

THE
COMPLETE WORKS
OF
JOHN M. MASON, D.D.
IN
FOUR VOLUMES.

EDITED BY HIS SON,
EBENEZER MASON.

VOL. I.

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INTRODUCTION.

IN issuing another edition of the late Dr. Mason's works, we have only yielded to a repeated call for them, and sought to furnish them to the community in a respectable form, and at a reasonable price. The demand for them has not been ephemeral, but steadily uniform, beyond what might have been expected from their miscellaneous character.

Most of the articles in this work arose from the exigencies of the periods in which they were written. They were thrown off *currente calamo*, under the pressure of varied public engagements and social claims. Essays, published in such associations, can scarcely be preserved from oblivion, or from being overlooked in the quiet enjoyment of *results* procured through their agency. In a few years, they are to be found, dust covered, only on the shelves of cotemporaneous friendship, of the strictly professional, and of the preservers of "things which were." In rare instances, some force of style, eloquence of thought, or skill in argument, secure a more frequent and lasting notice; but soon new events, new men, and new productions arise, and claim honors of their own. Nearly a generation has passed away since Dr. Mason withdrew from public life; and his pen,

except for a few sermons, was laid aside years previous to his personal retirement. His writings have retained their value with the public. The reasons of the steady call for them are to be found, perhaps, in the *wide sphere of Dr. Mason's actions*, in the unquestionable *results* of those actions, and in the *soundness of the principles* embodied in his writings.

Entering into public life in ecclesiastical connections, not at that time most favorable to extended opportunity and influence, he eventually occupied positions which turned the eyes of the church and the community upon him, imposed burdens he could not decline, and finally laid on him the labor of several men; so that at fifty years of age he was prematurely old, worn out in the service of his fellow men. His mind worked with great vigor and directness; it appears to have moved onward, as new and urgent drafts were made upon its energies, until its strong frame-work, deprived of its due supply of nervous influence, yielded, and forced the willing spirit to cease its efforts for human advancement in the service of its Master. Importunate friendship, and ready compliance did afresh, in his case, as it had done before, regret that the one had been so imperious, and the other so yielding. It was useless to lament. "Space for repentance was not to be found." Yet it is not to be doubted, that had Dr. Mason more considerately refused, the firmness of his attachments and the zeal of his devotion would have been questioned; as it was, this master-spirit for generosity and benevolence, as well as for conception and execution, had his readiness to do good charged upon him as the aspirings of an ambitious spirit. "But wisdom is justified of her children." It is known to us that the spirit of true Christianity is a lamp of

over human infirmities, has called forth acknowledgments of misjudgment and consequent censure. These, as they were an honor to those who voluntarily offered them, did no more than justice to the character they affected. The life of Dr. Mason could not, it is evident, be one of leisure, nor would its labors admit of a free use of the pen, could he in any wise dispense with it. Endowed with quick perceptions, the power of rapid and correct analysis, a ready and rich command of language, and forcible and original modes of presenting his views, he felt not the necessity for preparation and composition, which have raised to eminence many gifted and excellent writers. We have always felt that what might have been a great facility to himself, and an important advantage to his cotemporaries, has been a loss to us who came after him. But when we know that his habits of exceeding accuracy, acquired in early life, placed his materials always at command; when we know how materials, drawn from any and every quarter, and oft of the most intractable character, were speedily, under the crucible of his own mental processes, reduced to form, and received the impress of sterling coin, we are not surprised that the labor of the pen was a fetter and drudgery, and wherever it might be, was thrown aside for the more easy communication to his listeners of his breathing thoughts and burning words.

Thus gifted and furnished, we may readily admit that in the exposition of the Scriptures, on the Lord's day; in his lectures before his theological students; and in his elucidations of the classics, with his pupils in Columbia College, he was pre-eminently attractive and instructive. Whatever the previous impressions of his scholars, in a short time every barrier of awful distance seemed to be

broken down, and his own spirit to be infused into their minds, leading, in many cases, to ardent and permanent friendships.

Whatever such a man might leave, undoubtedly would be gladly hailed and preserved; the printed record of his thoughts would be cherished and studied. Occasional dissent from his reasonings and conclusions would not restrict the circulation of the few remaining memorials of one, so distinguished, so respected, and so beloved; and through the natural operation of the social principle, this circulation would be largely increased. This is not the place, nor are we in the position to enlarge upon the facts now recalled. In a memoir they might be more copiously treated. A personal knowledge is desirable to set them forth in an appropriate manner, and we know not where that knowledge is to be found in connection with the leisure to prepare them for the public eye; for this we hope against hope.

Personal recollections fade. As men, like shadows, flee away, the incidents of life become to succeeding generations, traditionary and inaccurate, and the interests in published writings diminish, and are superseded by more recent movements, and vanish away. The remains of Dr. Mason, however, survive, and not only so, but live. They seem to have acquired a permanent footing, and to have become standard, as is the case with more systematic and carefully prepared writings. In Great Britain, as in the United States, the desire to possess his writings has increased, notwithstanding their ephemeral aspect, and local origin.

The reason for this, unquestionably, is to be found in the *results* attendant upon Dr. Mason's agency, as concerns our own land, and the importance of the *principles*

discussed applicable to other lands as well as our own, and whose general soundness the providence of God appears to establish.

In pursuing the train of thought now suggested, we wish to be understood as cordially respecting the persons who still hold the sentiments which Dr. Mason sought to set aside. Some we reckon among our personal friends, and for those we know, we have sincere esteem. *Humanum est errare*, is a principle we apply to ourselves when most decidedly advancing our own opinions, and dissenting from those of others, and we believe no man more fully recognized the fact of human infirmity, or was more ready to make honorable concessions of error in matter or manner than Dr. Mason. In recording the history of his writings, and intimating our personal agreement with their principles, we cannot be suspected of any design to reproach or wonder at dissentients from whom we have learned much, and are ready to learn more. That be far from us. Our own opportunities for observations in God's providence have not been limited, nor our conclusions hasty ; and we confess, as the result, that our impressions of Dr. Mason's remarkable intuition, and general correctness of view, have been largely and permanently deepened. He seems to have written with the eyes of a *seer*, and to have uttered himself with the sure confidence of one who "testified that which he saw."

The explanation of this is, perhaps, wholly to be found in the paramount authority of the Scriptures over his mind, and in the unfailing supply of celestial wisdom they afforded to his penetrating and appropriating mind. Into their brightness he peered as with eagle eye, and under their inspiration he would soar to heights sublime,

animated with the spirit of Him to whom they bear testimony, and whom he delighted to serve.

The ecclesiastical connection, (Associate Reformed,) through which he was introduced into public life, enjoyed to the fullest extent the prime and the freshness of his youthful and his matured labors. To the extension of her influence he cheerfully abandoned himself. Next to his sense of personal devotion to God, she stood foremost in his thoughts, and received his untiring efforts and ardent prayers. Up to the point of personal obligation to the *truth* laid upon his conscience, (and that he never would, and never should have been required to yield,) there was no extent of service and willing respect he did not readily award to her. Indeed, the intensity of his affection became the occasion of those efforts, which some interpreted as hostile and injurious. It was his desire that the church of his fathers, and in which he was nursed, and of which he was made a minister, should be *truly scriptural* in all her observances, and that, as a blessing to the community, she should be prominent, and even pre-eminent.

The "Letters on Frequent Communion," are Dr. Mason's earliest productions in behalf of his own communion, that she might, in freedom from unauthorized and oppressive burdens, enjoy more frequently and more profitably, and more extensively, the privilege of celebrating the Lord's Supper. The result of these Letters is a matter of history, and we know some Presbyteries of the Old World who, having embraced their conclusions, are now testifying to the advantage of the relief in their own localities; and we were much amused with the reply of a worthy and eminent minister, who declined reading the Letters, on the ground that "he could not afford to be

convinced" of the impropriety of their sacramental services. These services are retained still by some churches in the midst of us. Most of those who will read these pages, are wholly unconscious of the obstacles surmounted, and the impediments removed, to effect any change. They have no conception of the anxiety of the past, as they quietly fall heirs to existing privileges, as though they had always been so from the beginning; and we cannot refrain making the remark, that the principles laid down in these Letters, carried out, will most surely affix the brand of *will-worship*, in no wise suspected, upon similar habits revived under another form.

Connected with these sacramental services was, and is, the practice of "close communion." This is a virtual non-recognition of the good standing of ministers, and people of other communions, though Presbyterian, and of like faith with themselves. It is a bar to a great degree* from ministerial exchanges and sacramental fellowship. An incident, recorded in a note,† awakened Dr. Mason's mind upon this practice of his church, and the courtesy of the congregation of the late Dr. Romeyn in offering the use of their house to Dr. Mason's people, effecting a practical union of two ministers and churches, of different denominations, holding the same doctrinal sentiments, and breaking down *at once* the fences of close communion, was the occasion of producing the work, "Communion on Catholic Principles." The excitement was intense—year after

* We have often wondered upon what principle it was, that we have been admitted to preach the *Gospel* to a people with whom we might not commune, nor to whom serve the sacramental elements. Is serving tables more holy than preaching the Gospel?

† See Essay on Catholic Communion, p. 8

year the subject was discussed in the Synod of the Assoc. Ref. Church—where the battle of liberty was fought and won. It was at this time the work was prepared and issued. It is, we doubt not, Dr. Mason's most valuable work. It was often printed from a page whose ink was scarcely dry, its subjects had been so thoroughly handled that composition was rapid; and, indeed, the present work is the substitute for one, half its size, which investigation and discussion satisfied Dr. Mason did not enter sufficiently into a detail of principles, facts, and deductions. It was republished in England, when the celebrated Dr. Hall, of Bristol, had just published a similar work in reference to communion between Baptists and Pædo-Baptists. The constant interchange of Dr. Romeyn and Dr. Mason in special services, and the amalgamation of their people in them, with the movements to which they gave rise, drew together all parties into bonds of Christian co-operation in a manner most heart-cheering, and now not easily conceived. The Bible Society, and extended forms of Missionary operation followed in due course; and the movement, with some checks, has been on the advance, and so will be, until the end shall come, and there shall be one heart, and one soul among all believers in Jesus Christ.

We are free to invite our readers to this work on Catholic Communion.

It will strengthen those who are daily illustrating its conclusions, it will arrest the tendency to exclusiveness, which, from some cause, so easily mixes itself with the spirit of sect, and it will lead some out into a freer, bolder, and more efficient action. We would urge its perusal *now* the more from recent movements in favor of a "Christian Alliance." All wish well to the principles such an alliance should embody. They may here receive

suggestions on the nature of Christian fellowship; what it requires, what it furnishes; and may be enabled so to steer clear of Scylla, without falling into Charybdis, it indeed they *must* need go through such a dangerous strait, before they can with a safe conscience, enter upon the sea of perfect liberty. The candor pervading this work, is as marked as its investigations are impartial, its conclusions are as eloquently urged as its principles are clearly stated. As the time to redeem Zion, through the cordial co-operation of her children throughout the world, shall advance, will the thoughts of this book be appreciated, until the wonder shall be, that such an elaborate work was needed, or that its outlines were ever called into question, seeing there is one fold and one Shepherd. The Lord hasten this glorious time!

It was in the connection of Dr. Mason with the Theological Seminary of the Associate Reformed Church that his devotion to that church, and his anxiety for her spiritual supply, were most conspicuous. This field had never been cultivated in this country. Ministerial education was either foreign, or such as individual pastors could bestow. With the exception, perhaps, of a movement on the part of the Reformed Dutch Church,—the Associate Reformed Church has the honor of breaking ground in this direction, as a church. To further its establishment, Dr. Mason visited Scotland and England. He met with good success in the collection of funds, and a library. What his views were, respecting the mode of working such an institution, and the solicitude with which he regarded its usefulness, may be learned from the action of Synod, and his own letters published in the fourth volume. His ministerial life was identified with its existence, as early as 1810, five years after it

was opened in the city of New York, he publicly* declared his conviction, that when his connection with the Seminary ceased, he should consider himself as ordered by his Master off from ministerial ground. It is a coincidence worthy of notice, that from the year of its merging into the Seminary at Princeton, by the union of a large portion* of the church with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, Dr. Mason's labors in the pulpit ceased ; and, in a few months, he withdrew from public life altogether. He lived to behold the fruits of his labors in the numbers sent forth from under his instruction, and to be thankful for the favor which God gave them in the churches. More than half rest from their labors, and most of the survivors are no mean men in their sacred calling ; and it may not be out of place to say there were features of instruction, and modes of dealing with the minds of young men, and provision for their acquaintance with, and settlement among the churches, that might have been, and may yet be, regarded by seminaries, succeeding and flourishing, to the eminent advantage of all concerned.

For two years solely, and two years conjointly with Dr. Romeyn, Dr. Mason edited the *Christian's Magazine*. From this magazine we have taken several articles.

The "Essay on the Use of the Lot," in the first volume of this edition, was written at a time when the

* See Speech on Resignation of his Pastoral Charge,—vol. iv. p. 2.

† A portion of the Associate Reformed Church at the North, did not enter into this union. Two Presbyteries dissented. In course of time they organized a seminary at Newburgh, Orange Co., New York, of which Dr. McCarroll is Professor, claimed the library of the New York Institution, and obtaining it, carried it to Newburgh, where it is known as the "Mason Library."

system of raising funds *by lottery*, for colleges and churches, received much encouragement. Legislation legalized what moralists and divines recommended. The evils arising out of the system, and its general abandonment, seems to furnish evidence that this application of the lot was improper. Whether the reader will agree with Dr. Mason, in the extent of his views, we would hesitate to affirm; but the time will not be lost which is occupied in perusing his statements; and a candid mind will duly weigh them. If there is an error, it is on the safe side. Men, for the most part, delight in the excitement of uncertainty—or expectation. This must arise from a perversion of the principle of hope, and the extensive use of the lot, associated with profit and loss, in any community, indicates the absence of some cardinal virtues, essential to social welfare. Its abuse tends to, and is connected with, corruptions of personal and social relations.

“Essays on the Church” are drawn from the same periodical. It is regretted that these essays were never completed in their designed fullness. The first portion is finished—the latter few pages afford a copious outline. The views presented will be appreciated by those who wish clear ideas of the “Church,” as it is understood by evangelical Christians. Some notions, widely embraced, may be modified.

As long as the exclusive claims of High Churchism and semi-popery, in the Episcopal communion, shall attract notice, so long will Dr. Mason’s review of such claims be in demand. The Review is a peculiar specimen of searching analysis. His arguments, we believe, never have been, and never will be set aside, until we get a new Bible, and new history, or more successful reason-

ers from the old ones. To preferences of modes and orders, there should be no objection made. Every honest man will have them. We love the Episcopalian, we may add, because of his preferences ; we have often joined in the services with delighted profit, and not a few we hold in our bonds of personal friendship. This was true of Dr. Mason. But for pretensions to exclusive rights, authority, and dignity, we have no respect whatever, and we wish we had no misgivings of loud-toned profession of Low Churchism, it has shown itself so sensitive, and so punctilious, on occasions where the superior validity of Episcopalian actions was jeopardded. In other words, if non-Episcopacy had divine *permission*, Episcopacy had a *clear warrant* ; whoever may be right, the Episcopalian cannot be *wrong*. Here is High Churchism in the bud—it only wants a little nursing, and it will blossom and bear fruit. True personal piety, and a mingling with men out of her pale, good and true as themselves, forbid some to stand boldly on an exclusive and unchurching platform ; rather than this, they would renounce the laying on of the hands of the Bishop, and be content with the simply “laying on of the hands of the Presbytery,” such as Timothy appears to have enjoyed. Why should beloved men blow hot and cold, and compel us to doubt their sincerity or their good sense.

For five years, Dr. Mason held the office of Provost, (created for him,) in Columbia College. During this period, the whole course of instruction underwent revision. His labor here was not light. The Report, made to the Trustees previous to his appointment, gives a fair statement of his thoughts on the subject of the higher departments of literature. His connection with this

institution is tenderly regarded by members of the senior classes, who came under his immediate instruction.

In assuming the presidency of Dickinson College, in Pennsylvania, Dr. Mason sought to carry out his plans, as far as circumstances would allow. Failing health did not permit a long continuance in his office; he resigned, within two years, and retired into private life. His inaugural address, and some lectures on "Evidences of Christianity," entitled "Light of Nature," appear in this edition.

The Orations on the death of Washington and Hamilton, give play to the mournful sense of national bereavement, and, in Hamilton's case, of personal loss. His "Warning" to the people, on the eve of Mr. Jefferson's election, indicates his ardent desires that our country should secure the divine care, by considering the character of those she honored with her confidence. This production was a bold movement for one just thirty years of age, and at a time when religion and its ministers were lightly esteemed by a prevalent and fashionable infidelity. Nothing but undaunted patriotism, and love of country would have called forth from one in Dr. Mason's position this glowing address to his countrymen.

Our remarks, already extended, require that we should pass other articles without notice.

The Sermons are the production of Dr. Mason's early ministry, the republication of a few occasional ones, and more especially, those delivered during the last two years of his ministry, in the city of New York, when necessity compelled him to read his discourses before his people. For the long period of TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, there are no written evidences of any preparation for the regular services of the pulpit, or for the de-

livery of his Lectures to his theological students; though it is well known that the former commanded the marked attention of his audiences, and that the latter, in the opinion of his students, and confessed by himself, occasioned his mightiest mental efforts, and drew forth his deepest emotions of soul. As a father, feeling for his children; as a preceptor, alive to the improvement of his pupils; above all, as a minister of the grace of God, preparing his little company for enduring the trials, and sharing the triumphs of the ministry of reconciliation, in all the unreserved tenderness of solicitude, hope, and prayer, the treasures of a gifted mind and glowing heart, were poured out upon their rapt spirits; and more than once have we heard his students state how their pens have been arrested, and their note books closed, under the uncontrollable emotions the discussed subject awakened in both preceptor and pupils. How often have we regretted that these moments of thought and pathos, never forgotten by their sharers, could not have been transferred to others, or that something of the richness of the scene could not have been preserved for the benefit of those who should come after: but, alas! no—not even the *crumbs* of these intellectual repasts are preserved to us, otherwise than they may have become incorporated with the mental action of those who partook of them. Regret is useless. God repeatedly teaches us, he can dispense with any of his creatures, however highly he has endowed them, or used for good their instrumentality. He saith, “Return, ye children of men.”

In sending forth this edition, the Editor has ventured to make the foregoing observations. No one can regret more than himself that it is unaccompanied by a memoir,

but Dr. Mason left so scanty materials, and his history is so interwoven with that of theological and literary education, that its compilation seems to require more personal knowledge, fuller materials, and greater fitness than he has been able to command. He is satisfied that anything he could accomplish would disappoint the public ; under this persuasion, he has hitherto turned a deaf ear to all suggestions on the subject. That he will always be of this mind, time and opportunity alone can determine.

Thus far, we have acted the part of collector, and arranger, and have sought to make this edition more full by a considerable addition of matter. The whole work is now stereotyped, and there is prefixed a print taken from an approved portrait. The style of its execution, we are satisfied, is worthy of the publishers who issue it, and will be appreciated by the readers.

Our residence out of the city has rendered our personal supervision of the press an impossibility, but it is hoped such care has been taken by the publishers as to avoid any material error. May the blessing of God accompany the circulation of these volumes.

EBENEZER MASON.

Bloomington, January, 18, 1849.

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A P L E A

FOR

H O L Y C O M M U N I O N

ON CATHOLIC PRINCIPLES.

INTRODUCTION

IN August, 1810, a combination of circumstances wholly providential, being unsought and unexpected by all concerned, led the third Associate Reformed Church in the city of New York, then recently formed under the ministry of Dr. JOHN M. MASON, to hold their assemblies in the house belonging to the church under the pastoral care of Dr. JOHN B. ROMEYN, a minister of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in North America. As the hours of service were different, the one congregation succeeding the other in the same place on the same day, the first effect of this arrangement was a partial amalgamation of the two societies in the ordinary exercises of public worship—the next, a mutual esteem growing out of mutual acquaintance with each other, as united in the same precious faith; and, finally, after a very short time, invitations on both sides to join in commemorating, at his

own table, the love of that Saviour who gave himself for them, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet smelling savor. The invitations were as cordially accepted as they were frankly given. The bulk of the members of both churches, as well as some belonging to correlate churches, mingled their affections and their testimony in the holy ordinance. The ministers reciprocated the services of the sacramental day ; and the communion, thus established, has been perpetuated with increasing delight and attachment, and has extended itself to ministers and private Christians of other churches.

Such an event, it is believed, had never before occurred in the United States. The Presbyterian Church in North America sprang immediately from the Established Church of Scotland. The Associate Reformed Church, Presbyterian also, was founded in the union of ministers and people from the two branches of the Secession in Scotland, and from the Reformed Presbytery.

When they emigrated to this country, it was not to be expected that the *esprit du corps*, their characteristic feelings, should perish in the Atlantic. All experience justifies the poet's remark,

Cælum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt ;

and accordingly, like the mother-churches, they maintained not only separate communions, but much of the old reserve and distance.

Portions of two denominations thus situated, laying aside their party distinctions, coming together on the broad ground of one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one "God and Father of all," and embracing each other in the most sacred and tender offices of Christian fellowship, presented a scene of no common or feeble interest. Its very novelty roused attention; and gave birth to speculations various as the temper, character, and condition of their authors. Rumor, with her "hundred tongues," was active, as usual, in bespeaking the public ear. Intelligence, announcing the truth, and more than the truth, but yet not the whole truth; and accompanied, occasionally, by surmises and comments ill calculated to make a favorable impression, was forwarded, with industrious celerity, to distant parts of the land.

The Associate Reformed Church, generally speaking, had been strict, and even exclusive, in her communion. The jealousy *naturally* entertained by her toward the General Assembly, was, to say the least, not diminished by the collisions which had taken place between many of their members, especially in the wes-

tern and southern parts of the United States. All things, therefore, considered, we are not to wonder that the report of what happened at New York was received, by very many, with dislike and alarm. This effect is so perfectly analogous to the laws which govern feeling in masses of men, that it could not have been hindered but by a miracle, or something very like a miracle. They are startled by nothing so soon as by encroachment upon their habits: and will rather permit their understanding to be unfruitful, than the routine of their thoughts and conduct to be broken up. Let us not complain of this propensity, although it may be, and often is, indulged too far. It is a wise provision in the economy of human nature, without which there would be neither stability, order, nor comfort. Remove it, and the past would furnish no lessons for the future: Intellect would be wasted on premises without conclusions, and life on experiments without results. Therefore no principle is more firmly established in the minds of all who think correctly and act discreetly, than this—that *wanton invasion of social habits is of the essence of folly*. Yet there is an extreme of caution as reprehensible and hurtful as the extreme of rashness. Till human opinions become infallible, the practices which grow out of them can-

not be *always* right. In many cases, as every party acknowledges of every other, they are decidedly wrong. It is thus settled by common consent, and for the best of reasons, that whatever be the courtesy due to public habit, we are not to bow before it with superstitious reverence. We should treat it as we are to treat our civil rulers, with unfeigned respect, but with a reserve for the obligation to obey God rather than man. At no time, and upon no pretence, must it be allowed to usurp the right of controlling conscience in matters of *scriptural principle*; nor to exert the pestilent prerogative of abetting the cause of error by arresting the progress of inquiry after truth. Unless we accede to this proposition, the rock is swept away from under our feet. The doctrine of Reformation is the worst of heresies; and every attempt to enforce it a profligate insurrection against human peace. "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" When there exist serious doubts, and those not hastily admitted, whether certain practical opinions, i. e. opinions which influence habit, among Christians, are really serviceable or injurious to the interests of pure Christianity, an opportunity of bringing their propriety to the test, instead of being lamented as an affliction, should be welcomed as a benefit. Such doubts

have been long entertained, and, as it is conceived, upon no slight grounds, not concerning the *avowed doctrine* of the Associate Reformed Church, respecting Christian communion, but concerning her *almost invariable practice* on that point. It has been, it is at this moment, more than doubted, whether the rigor of her restrictive communion corresponds with the genius of the gospel; with the best spirit of the best churches in the best of times; or with her own professed principles. The writer of these pages confesses that such has been long the state of his own mind. Considerations of public delicacy, induced him, for a number of years, not merely to abstain from the use of his liberty, but to forego what he accounted a high evangelical privilege; and to submit to these sacrifices under the painful apprehension, at least on some occasions,* that he might be found to have lent himself to mere party passions, when he ought to have immolated them on the altar of love to Jesus Christ, in expressions of love which he was compelled to deny even to those who bore the image of Christ. He has not

* One of these occasions it is impossible for him to forget. He 'ad been distributing tokens of admission to the Lord's supper. After the congregation had retired, he perceived a young woman at the lower end of an aisle reclining on a pew in a pensive attitude. As he approached her, she said, "Sir, I am afraid I have done wrong?" Why, what have you done? "I went up with the communicants, and received a token. but am not a member of your church: and I could not be at rest till I spoke to you about it." To what church do you belong? "To the Dutch church:

been alone in this embarrassment. And he is far from regretting an event which led him and others of his brethren to an exchange of communion most consonant, as they believe, to the divine word, and to the very letter and spirit of that form of sound doctrine which, in the most solemn moment of their lives, under the oath of God in their ordination vows, they bound themselves to maintain and to apply. He cannot regret such an event, because it invites a free discussion, and may conduct to a comfortable decision, of the great question concerning "the communion of saints." With this view he solicits calm and candid attention, while he endeavors to trace, without disguise, the general course of those reflections and reasonings of which the result has created so much public agitation.

and, if you wish it, I can satisfy you of my character and standing there." But what made you come for a token without mentioning the matter before? "I had not an opportunity, as I did not know in time that your communion was to be next Lord's day. I am sorry if I have done wrong: but I expect to leave the city on Tuesday; and to be absent, I cannot tell how long, in a part of the country where I shall have no opportunity of communing; and I wished, once more before I went away, to join with Christians in showing forth my Saviour's death." He consulted a moment with the church-officers who were still present; and it was thought most expedient not to grant her request. He communicated this answer as gently as possible to the modest petitioner. She said not another word; but with one hand giving back the token, and with the other putting up her kerchief to her eyes, she turned away, struggling with her anguish, and the tears streaming down her cheeks. How did his heart smite him! He went home exclaiming to himself, "Can this be right? Is it possible that such is the law of the Redeemer's house?" It quickened his inquiries; his inquiries strengthened his doubts; and have terminated in the conviction that it was altogether wrong.

PART I.

The Scriptural Doctrine.

STRANGE as it may appear, it is nevertheless true, that men who have the Bible in their hands as their *only* rule of faith and practice, appeal immediately to its testimony, for their *justification*, but very rarely for their *information*. They take for granted that their peculiarities are right, and that the only use of the scripture is to *prove* them. Much is gained when, instead of putting their language into the mouth of the book of God, the book of God is allowed to sit in judgment upon themselves, and to pronounce its own verdict. This is that course of truth which, however feebly, we shall endeavor to follow. So that our leading inquiry contemplates the direct doctrine of the scripture concerning Christian fellowship.

We must go to first principles :

There is no point more fully settled in the scriptures, than this, that

The Church of God is ONE.

It were endless to collect all the proofs. Let one suffice. Paul, or rather the Holy Ghost, who spake by his mouth and wrote with his pen, has thus represented it. *As the body is ONE, and hath many members; and all the members of that one body, being MANY, are ONE BODY; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we ALL baptized into ONE body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been ALL made to drink into ONE Spirit. For the BODY is not ONE member, but MANY.* This analogy between man's natural body and the spiritual body of Christ, which he elsewhere declares to be the church, Paul presses at great length, and with unusual minuteness. He does it, as any one who shall seriously peruse the context may see, with the design of reproving, and, if possible, destroying that vain-glorious temper which had infected the Corinthian converts; each one arrogating to himself, or to that class with which his gifts more immediately connected him, a peculiar pre-eminence and sanctity; as if he and his associates were the special favorites of God, and enjoyed so exclusively the nobler ministrations of the Spirit, as to justify their contempt of others whom they thought to be less distinguished. In order to demonstrate the unreasonableness and unrighteousness of such

conduct, he lays down certain indisputable principles concerning the natural body; ex. gr.

1. That the multitude of its members does not destroy its unity, nor their relation to it as a whole—*all the members of that one body, being MANY, are ONE body.*

2. That their union with the body is the foundation of all the value, beauty, and excellence of the members in their respective places.

3. That the efficiency of the members consists in their mutual co-operation as parts of a common whole—*that there should be no SCHISM in the body.*

4. That from their union with the body, there results, by a divine constitution, a communion of interests; a sympathy of feeling, and a reciprocation of benefits—*that the members should have the same care one for another: And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

The use of this similitude Paul declares to be an illustration of the unity of the church, and of the intimate communion of believers. *Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*

It is true that the Apostle turns his argument directly against the contentions in the Corinthian church about the superiority, or inferiority,

of public offices and spiritual gifts. *And God hath set some in the church; first, apostles, secondarily, prophets.* But it is also true that the *principles* of his argument are general; are equally applicable to everything which tends to cherish among Christians a *party feeling*, at the expense of weakening the sense of their union, or of interrupting their communion, as members of the body of Christ; and were intended to be so applied: For,

They are part of the Apostle's remonstrance against the schismatic spirit which had split up the church of Corinth into a number of factions: one crying, "I am of Paul;" another, "I am of Apollos;" another, "I am of Cephas;" and another, more proud and boasting more purity than any of the rest, "I am of Christ." Scandalous, however, as their schisms were, they had not proceeded to separation, nor did they dream of breaking communion. If the Apostle so sternly reprehended their divisions as inconsistent with the unity of the church, although they continued to hold communion together, what would he have said, how would he have thundered forth his indignant rebuke had they carried their contests so far as to burst the bonds of communion, and, by that fact, virtually to disown each other as members of the body of Christ?

Moreover, the Apostle has himself extended his argument to matters which, without affecting the substance of our faith, hope, or duty, do yet produce great diversity of opinion and habit and has shown that they ought not to infringe upon Christian union ; nor, consequently, upon the expression of it in Christian communion. Between the freeman and the slave, between the barbarian and the Greek, between the Gentile and the Jew, there existed wide differences of condition and feeling, and large sources of animosity. But, saith Paul, they must all yield to the force, they must all bow before the majesty, of this consideration ; that the Christian freeman and slave—the Christian barbarian and Greek—the Christian Gentile and Jew, have *by one Spirit been all baptized into one body*. What is this but to say, that the union of believers with each other as members of the body of Christ, is more precious than any other union, civil, national, or ecclesiastical ? and will always outweigh, in the balance of God's judgment, the heaviest pleas which can be accumulated for recognizing any other in preference to it ; or for not recognizing it in preference to every other.

Finally. The Apostle opposes the spirit of ecclesiastical faction to the spirit of Christian love. This heavenly grace he exalts above

prophecies, tongues, knowledge, the faith of miracles, the most magnificent alms, the very zeal of martyrdom ! Now this love, the only cure for the gangrene of party strife—the most characteristic feature of Christ's image in a renewed man—the most precious fruit of his grace ; and yet the fruit which the bulk of his professed followers seem to think themselves under hardly any obligations to cultivate—this love is declared to originate in the love of God shed abroad in the heart ; and to be drawn out toward the brethren precisely on this account, that they are the *children of God*—the disciples of Christ—and therefore not on account of their adherence to one or another denomination, however sound it may be in the faith. *Hereby*, said the Master, *hereby shall all men know that ye are MY disciples, if ye have love one to another.* Every one, adds the beloved John, who lay in his bosom and drank deeply into his spirit, *every one that loveth him that be- gat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.* And surely the description which Paul has given of Christian love, in the chapter before us, corresponds to any thing else as well as to that gloomy distance and sour disdain, which are cherished by some professors towards others of whose graces the light is at least equal to their own ; and which, by a hardihood not

easily attained or equalled, are converted into a testimony for Jesus Christ !

Since, therefore, the Apostle has resembled the unity of the Christian church and the union of Christians, to the unity of the human body and the union of its members ; and since the use of this similitude in his exhortation with the Corinthian schismatics was only a special application of a doctrine general in itself, and applicable everywhere and always to feuds and divisions among those who embrace substantially the same faith, let us, in few words, gather up its results, and see how they bear upon the subject of sacramental communion.

1. The body of Christ is one.

2. Every member of this body has, by a divine constitution, utterly independent on his own will, both union and communion with every other member, as infallibly as hands and feet, eyes, ears, and nose, are, by the very constitution of the physical body, united together as parts of a whole, and sympathize with each other accordingly.

3. The members of this body of Christ have a common and inalienable interest in all the provision which God has made for its nutriment, growth, and consolation ; and that simply and absolutely, because they are members of that body. Therefore,

4. The members of the church of Christ, individually and collectively, are under a moral necessity, i. e. under the obligation of God's authority, to recognize each other's character and privileges; and, consequently, not to deny the tokens of such recognition. Sacramental communion is one of those tokens: therefore, the members of the church of Christ, *as such*, are under the obligation of God's authority to recognize their relation to Christ and to each other, by joining together in sacramental communion. Nor has any church upon earth the power to refuse a seat at the table of the Lord to one whose "conversation is as becometh the gospel." If she has, she has derived it from some other quarter than her master's grant; and founds the privilege of communion with *her* in something else than a person's "having received Christ Jesus the Lord, and walking in him." Let her look to herself, and see what account she shall be able to render of her usurpation.

This general conclusion, flowing irrefragably from the scriptural doctrine of the unity of Christ's body and the union and communion of its members, is illustrated and confirmed by a consideration of the *tenure* by which all Christian churches and people hold their Christian privileges.

None whom these pages address will pretend that there are no true Christians in the world but themselves, and no true churches but their own—that all other professors are mere heathen; and all their churches, synagogues of Satan. The very idea of such arrogance is abhorred by those whose feelings and practice are most adverse to free communion. They profess to acknowledge and honor other churches—to rejoice in the gifts and graces of other Christians—to account them “as dear children” of God; as “brethren beloved” in their common Redeemer: nor is there any reason to doubt the sincerity of such professions. This is all right—Christian-like—just as it should be. But does it never appear to these good men somewhat incongruous to decline taking a family-meal with any of the household of faith who do not happen to occupy the same apartment with themselves? to own them as “saints,” and “precious” saints; and yet deny them the provision which belongs to the saints? And at the moment of greeting them as brethren, *beloved* brethren, to tell them, “you shall not have, at the table where *we* sup, one crumb of the bread, nor one drop of the wine which Jesus, both your Lord and ours, has given to you as well as to us?” This is certainly an original way of expressing *love*!

But, to press the matter a little closer. These true churches and Christians have a right to the holy sacraments, or they have not. If not, it is a contradiction to call them true churches : the rightful possession of the sacraments being essential to the existence of a true church. They have then such a right. How did they obtain it ? By a grant from the Lord Jesus Christ, unquestionably. He gave all church privileges to his church catholic ; and from this catholic grant do all particular churches derive their right to, and their property in whatever privileges they enjoy. Other true churches, then, hold their right to all church privileges by the very same tenure by which we hold ours ; and, consequently, the members of those churches have the very same right to the table of the Lord as the members of our own. By what authority, therefore, does any particular church undertake to invalidate a right bestowed by Christ himself ? And what less, or what else, does she attempt, when she refuses to admit Christians from other particular churches to the participation of any ordinance which Christ has established for their common use ? The sacramental table is spread. I approach and ask for a seat. You say, “ No.” “ Do you dispute my Christian character and standing ?” “ Not

in the least.” “Why, then, am I refused?” “You do not belong to *our* church.” “*Your* church! what do you mean by *your* church? Is it anything more than a branch of *Christ’s* church? Whose table is this? Is it the *Lord’s* table, or *yours*? If yours and not his, I have done. But if it is the *Lord’s*, where did you acquire the power of shutting out from its mercies any one of his people? I claim my seat under my master’s grant. Show me your warrant for interfering with it.”

Methinks it should require a stout heart to encounter such a challenge: and that the sturdiest sectarian upon earth, not destitute of the fear of God, should pause and tremble before he ventured upon a final repulse. The language of such an act is very clear and daring. “You have, indeed, Christ’s invitation to his table; but you have not *mine*. And without *mine*, *his* shall not avail.” Most fearful! Christ Jesus says, *do this in remembrance of me*. His servants rise to obey his command; and a fellow servant, acting in the name of that Christ Jesus, under the oath of God, interposes *his* veto, and says—“You shall not.” Whose soul does not shrink and shudder!

Place the subject in another light. Is it, or is it not the *duty* of Christians in all true churches to show forth the Lord’s death in the

sacrament of the supper? If not, then we have true churches and Christians under no obligation to observe the most characteristic and discriminating of the Christian ordinances. Here, again, is a contradiction nearly in terms. For who can acknowledge a true church without sacraments? If it is—if it would be a great corruption, a grievous sin in those churches to expel or neglect their sacraments, and consign the memorial of their Saviour's love to utter oblivion, it may be further asked—whether, in acquitting themselves of their duty, they perform an acceptable service unto God or not? If they may, and do; and that with the most evident tokens of their master's approbation, as no sober Christian will deny, how should an act of communion in “the body and blood of the Lord,” be lawful and commanded to a person in one true church, and be unlawful and forbidden to that same person in another? How should two persons both *honor* the Redeemer by communicating in their respective churches, and both *dishonor* him by the very same thing, if they should happen to exchange places? On what principle of truth or consistency can any man ascribe to a subdivision of God's church, the privilege of controlling the general laws by which the whole is to be governed, and the more than magic

virtue of transmuting the character of individuals and of their worship, by the mere fact of their belonging or not belonging to such subdivision? So that the question of their honoring the table of the Lord, or their profaning and polluting it, shall turn precisely on this point, Whether they are members of that particular church or not? Hence emerges a dilemma from which the brethren we have to contend with will find it difficult to make their escape. You must either avow or disavow the doctrine which has just been imputed to your practice. Take your choice. If you avow it, you stand self-convicted of corrupting to their core the institutions of your master. If you disavow it, why do you demand more than the evidence of Christian character as a qualification to communion with *you*? On this side of the dilemma you stand self-convicted of repelling, without reason, your Christian brethren from the table of the Lord. Either way, your condemnation proceeds out of your own mouth.

If anything be wanting to this general argument, let us inquire at the Christian sacraments. They are admitted, by all Protestants, to be but two, baptism and the Lord's supper. What is their nature? What is their use? And to whom are they to be administered?

We may take our answer from an authority unquestioned by the parties to this discussion.

“Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits ; and to confirm our interest in him : as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church, and the rest of the world ; and solemnly to engage them to the service of Christ, according to his word.”

Assuming this account of the sacraments to be scriptural, they are clearly the common property of all Christians under the whole heaven.

1. “They are signs and seals of the covenant of grace.” Now, all believers, in all places of Christ’s kingdom upon earth, have their share in the mercies of that covenant : therefore, all believers, having the *thing signified*, have a perfect right to the *sign*.

2. They “represent Christ and his benefits, and confirm an interest in him.” Therefore, all believers, being partakers of Christ and his benefits ; in other words, having an interest in him, are the proper recipients of those ordinances whose use is to “confirm” that interest to their faith.

3. “They put a visible difference between those that belong to the church and the rest

of the world.” Therefore, they who belong unto the church of God, who are known and recognized as Christians, have a right to this badge of discrimination, and are bound to put it on and wear it, as they shall have opportunity, in whatever part of God’s church they may happen to be. Consequently, they who so narrow the use of this badge, as to make it distinguish not merely the church from the world; the follower from the foe of Christ Jesus; but the church from the church, the follower from the follower, the friend from the friend of Christ Jesus; and thus to exhibit them as having separate *Christian* interests, corrupt—not the form and circumstances—but the matter, but the substance, of the holy sacraments.

4. They “solemnly engage believers to the service of Christ according to his word.” Therefore all who have entered into his service, and mean to regulate their lives by his word—and what Christian does not?—have a right to the sacramental encouragement, commensurate with the sacramental oath. Which of them can innocently refuse the oath? To which of them may the encouragement be innocently denied? And who art thou, sinful flesh, escaped by thy master’s grace from the damnation of hell, that darest—yes—**DAREST**,

to keep back from the vow and the consolations of thy master's table *any* whom thou acknowledgest to be the objects of his love ?

It results,

1. That they who have a right to sacramental communion anywhere, have a right to it everywhere ; and, conversely, that they who have not a right to it everywhere, have a right to it nowhere.

2. That no qualification for such communion may, by the law of Christ, be exacted from any individual other than **VISIBLE CHRISTIANITY** ; i. e. a profession and practice becoming the gospel, without regard to those sectarian differences which consist with the substance of evangelical truth.

PART II.

Facts.

IN questions concerning social observances, the first and most prevalent presumption is in favor of those under which the existing generation was born and educated. What they have always seen before their own eyes, followed in their own practice, and received by tradition from their fathers, the bulk of men consider as having on its side the double advantage of prescription and right. Without exercising much thought on the matter, they have a sort of quiet hereditary notion that it always was as it is, and is as it ought to be. Whatever, therefore, has, in their eye, the appearance of novelty, is an object of suspicion. New and false—new and hurtful, are with them terms of equal import. The conclusion would be sound were the premises correct. In doctrines of faith and ordinances of worship there can be no room for original discoveries. The divine rule for both remains as it was when the sacred canon was closed. If we date from *that*

period, then, indeed, everything new, i. e. everything unknown to the inspired records, if proposed as an article of faith, or an institution of worship, is necessarily false and hurtful. Here, novelty and crime are the same. Wherefore the essential merits of controversies upon all such points are to be examined and decided by the scripture alone. And every decision agreeable to the scripture takes precedence of all others, how long soever they may have been possessed of the public mind, on the ground both of right and of prescription. Of right, because it is the voice of the law which has the sole prerogative of binding conscience—Of prescription, because God's institutions in his own church must ever be *first*, and all deviations from them, novelties; absolute novelties in their commencement; and comparative novelties at the latest moment of their existence afterwards. On the strength of this principle did the PROTESTANT REFORMERS expel the corruptions of Popery, although they were of old standing; entwined for ages with the habits of society; cherished with *unfeigned* ecclesiastical fondness, and halloed by popular devotion. To this principle we must ourselves submit—we must even court its application to our own observances, if we hope to pass for the sons of those who,

at every personal hazard, and under every dismaying prospect—through fire and through flood ; the fire of their own “ wood, hay, stubble,” kindled by their own hands ; and the flood of vengeance poured around them out of the mouth of the Dragon, bore off in safety the gold, the silver, the precious stones, of evangelical treasure ; and re-established on earth, by the succors of heaven, the almost ruined cause of truth and grace. Let us, therefore, treading in the steps of those Christian heroes, carry our inquiries back in order to ascertain whether the *catholic* communion for which these pages plead ; or the *sectional* communion, so to speak, which characterizes many Christian denominations, receives the most countenance from the faith and practice of the church of God through ages past.

The facts to be embraced by this inquiry may be distributed into three classes : and are furnished by the history of the church strictly called *Apostolical*, i. e. as it existed in the days of the Apostles themselves—by the history of the *primitive* church which immediately succeeded—and by the history of the church as renovated in the *Reformation from Popery*.

1. Facts from the Apostolic history. For these we must go the New Testament itself.

One of these facts occurs in the case of the

first converts, who became such under the first sermon after the full introduction of the New Testament economy. When the Jews, “pricked in their heart” by the plain and pungent preaching of Peter, cried out, “Brethren, what shall we do?” the Apostle replied, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.*” Let us view the bearings of this transaction.

1st. Peter had quoted a passage from the prophet Joel, promising *salvation* to faith in, and profession of, the Lord Jesus, for thus he proves and applies the sense of the oracle in his subsequent reasoning.

2d. Peter represents this faith as having for its object *Christ crucified*; i. e. Christ “who bore our sins in his own body on the tree;” the substitute, the propitiary sacrifice in the room of believers on him.

3d. Having held up to their view Jesus the crucified, the Christ, he enjoins on them a change of all their erroneous notions concerning his person, his kingdom, and his work; and to receive the truth in its simplicity—“*Repent.*”

4th. On the supposition of such repentance he commands them to “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” They drank in this precious doctrine as the

thirsty land drinks in the rain from heaven. They “gladly received his word; and upon receiving it “were *baptized*.”

It appears, therefore, that in the very first precedent for admission to sealing ordinances, and *that* set under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the *only* qualification was *faith in the Lord Jesus as the Saviour of sinners by the blood of his cross*—a faith manifested by a credible profession of his name.

Another fact occurs in the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch. The story is told in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Philip the evangelist, having, by divine admonition, accosted this distinguished officer as he was returning home from Jerusalem, and been courteously invited into his chariot, instructed him, from a passage of Isaiah which he was then reading, in the doctrine of Jesus the Messiah, and of the nature and use of the Christian sacraments. The first is plainly asserted in v. 35, and the second as plainly implied in v. 36. For how could he ask such a question as, “See! here is water—what doth hinder me to be baptized?” if he had been taught nothing of that sacrament? Philip replied, that if he was a sincere believer in that Jesus, he might. Without delay he makes the re-

quisite profession of his faith, and is baptized accordingly.

Here, in perfect conformity with the original precedent already produced, is a minister of the gospel acting under the immediate injunction of the Holy Spirit, administering one of the sealing ordinances to a new disciple upon no other terms than a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

A *third* fact occurs in the history of Saul; Acts, ix. That furious persecutor, having been miraculously arrested on his journey to Damascus in quest of the blood of the saints; and undergone, during the three days of his blindness and fasting, such discipline and instruction from the Lord Jesus himself, as both changed his heart and qualified him for the Apostleship, was admitted forthwith to the sacrament of baptism. Upon what ground? Simply on the ground of his *belonging to Christ*. For on this ground Christ himself placed it. *He is a chosen vessel unto me*, saith the Redeemer. That the knowledge of this fact was communicated by *revelation* to Ananias, is of no weight in the present argument. For the question is not, “*How* are we to ascertain a man’s Christianity?” But whether, on the supposition of its being ascertained, (which is always supposed when we *admit* its existence,) it is, *in*

and of itself, a sufficient title to gospel ordinances in whatever part of the church catholic they may happen to be dispensed ? If it is not—if anything more than the evidence of Christian character be requisite to create both the right and the obligation to reciprocal communion, it is clear that an immediate revelation from God certifying such a character, would not form a valid claim to communion. The Apostle elect of the Gentiles should have gone unbaptized !

A *fourth* fact occurs in the case of Cornelius, the first Gentile admitted into the Christian church. All the circumstances of his reception are too minutely related in the tenth chapter of the Acts, and are too familiar to every serious reader, to allow of repetition in this place. Our concern is with the concluding scene.

While Peter was opening up the plan of salvation, “ the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, *Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which HAVE RECEIVED THE HOLY GHOST AS*

WELL AS WE? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."

This descent of the Holy Ghost was visible proof of God's acceptance; and the *sole* principle on which the Apostle pronounced them to be fit subjects for sacramental recognition; and actually did admit them to all the privileges of the Christian church. The news of such an event was not slow in travelling. "The Apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God." The account of Peter's share in this revolution was too essential to be overlooked. His Jewish brethren were stumbled, and alarmed. No sooner does he appear at Jerusalem, than a complaint is tabled against him. "They that were of the circumcision contended with him." Well, what is the offence? He had held corrupt communion! How? "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." The fact was indisputable; but the inference, viz. that he had acted irregularly, if not irreligiously, was unfounded. His brethren reasoned from their prejudices, and came to their conclusion before they had examined the merits of the cause. Nor is it unworthy of remark, that, in their complaint, they laid a great stress upon a circumstance which habit had erected into

ecclesiastical law, but which it were vain to seek in any commandment of God—the unlawfulness of religious or even social intercourse *with a Gentile!* And so heinous in their eyes was this transgression of the “tradition of the elders,” that it served as a point of concentration for their whole grievance. *Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them!*

N. B. It is no new thing for good and upright men, through the force of prepossession, the want of information, and precipitancy of judgment arising from both, to blame that which God approves; to set themselves against that which God has authorized; and to be strenuous for that which God disregards. This was the error of Peter’s brethren. However, with the consciousness not only of pure intention, but of laudable conduct, he calmly listens to their accusation, and vindicates his proceedings in a manner equally admirable for its meekness and its dignity. “He rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them;” giving a succinct history of the steps by which he was led, under a divine communication, to the house of Cornelius; of his preaching the gospel there; and of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon his Gentile hearers. His reasoning upon the facts is thus nervously summed up. “Then remem-

bered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, *John indeed baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.* Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ ; what was I, that I could withstand God ?”

The prominent points in this reasoning are,

1st. God has given to these Gentiles that Holy Spirit of whom the water in John’s baptism was an emblem and pledge.

2d. God has thus borne witness to them as his children, and heirs of his promise.

3d. God has put them upon a perfect level with ourselves, by this testimony to their faith in Christ Jesus ; so that whatever privileges we have, they have also ; and are entitled to receive *with* us and *from* us.

4th. Under this evidence of their gracious relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, to refuse them the seal of that relation were to RESIST God ! And, therefore, he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord : which is precisely equivalent to his administering the ordinance with his own hands.

The opposition ceased—the brethren were satisfied. They had been warm in their displeasure ; but they yielded to the light of truth—they yielded magnanimously—when it

was once proved that these Gentiles were owned of God ; were placed among *his* people, and blessed with his Spirit ; the doubt was removed ; the debate was over ; and instead of cavilling, or hunting up small distinctions by the aid of which they might seem to acknowledge the Christian character of the new converts, and yet censure the Apostle Peter for holding communion with them, they joined together in humble thankfulness to God for this additional display of his grace. “They held their peace”—they had no more fault to find, nor objections to make ; “and glorified God, saying, then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” Why should it not be so still ? Why should not such proof of Christian character in others, no matter whom, as we deem sufficient among ourselves, be at this hour, as it was then, the rule of Christian fellowship on the broadest scale ? And a refusal of that communion to any whom we own that God has owned by the same tokens which he has given to us, be now, as it would have been then, a **WITHSTANDING OF GOD ?**

A *fifth* fact occurs in the history of the reference from Antioch, and of the proceedings thereon by the Synod of Jerusalem. Acts, xv.

“Certain men,” ministers of the word,

“ which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, *Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.* This doctrine, false and dangerous, tending to subvert the entire fabric of evangelical truth, Paul and Barnabas promptly and firmly resisted. But the erroneous teachers persevering, and being probably supported by Jewish converts, with very little prospect of gaining over the Gentiles ; it was judged expedient for the prevention of feuds, to refer the question to the Apostles and Presbyters at Jerusalem. They accepted the reference—took the subject into consideration—condemned the doctrine which had raised the ferment in Antioch—prohibited the preaching of it in future—and, with regard to the remaining differences, advised both parties to forbearance and love.

The value of their decision, as a precedent for posterity, lies in its *principle*. On the one hand, that venerable council would not endure, “ no, not for an hour,” the least infringement upon that prime essential of Christianity, the *justification of a sinner by faith ALONE*: nor, on the other, would they countenance the spirit of schism and separation, even for the sake of *important differences* which left both sides in possession of the *substantial* truth. On these matters they enjoined respect to each others

feelings—they enjoined bearing and forbearing—they enjoined “endeavors to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”—they did not enjoin, nor abet, nor in any wise encourage, the disruption of communion. Prejudice herself must confess that the variance between the Gentile and Jewish believer on the subject of circumcision and of the Mosaic law generally, even without the notion of its necessity to salvation, was much wider than the variance between many Christians who will not commune together in the body and blood of their common Lord. The sense of their union with him, according to the Apostolic rule, should absorb their inferior discrepancies of opinion and practice among themselves. But, directly reversing this order, their inferior discrepancies overpower the sense of their union as one in him. O how unlike the spirit and the example of those glorious days of the Son of man !

The scriptural details might be prosecuted further ; but it is superfluous. They are all of one complexion. Nor is there any hazard in asserting, without qualification, that there is not in all the New Testament, one solitary doctrine or fact which so much as implies, or can be made by any tolerable interpretation to *appear* to imply, that the Lord Jesus has

authorized the exaction of any term whatever for the *whole fellowship* of his church, other than visible Christianity. Objections will be noticed in their proper place.

II. The second class of facts is furnished by the history of the *primitive church* from the days of the Apostles to the close of the fourth century.

It was not more her character, during that period, to profess Christianity, than it was to assert her catholic *unity*; and to cherish, on all occasions, the most tender solicitude for its preservation. This is so evident, that an attempt to set forth its proofs at large would be altogether impertinent. No man who has only glanced at the writings of the early fathers, will raise a doubt on the subject. It is material, however, to inquire in what she viewed her unity as consisting—by what it was liable to be broken—and how it was to be maintained.

Her unity consisted in her common faith, her common institutions—and brotherly love.

1. The chief attribute of her unity was her common faith; i. e. the faith which was common to her members all over the world.

In the exposition of her faith, as a rallying point of union, she confined herself to a few great principles—principles which are, every-

where and at all times, vital to the religion of Jesus—and without which it is impossible there should be either Christianity or Christians. Nothing can be more simple, nor summed up with more studious brevity than the early creeds, or, as they were called, *symbols of the faith*. That little composition, familiarly known by the name of the “*Apostles’ creed*,” though probably not their work, may give the reader a correct idea of their general structure. For his further satisfaction, however, I shall translate another specimen from *Irenæus*, a disciple of *Polycarp*, and a most strenuous defender of the purity of the faith against various heresies.

“The church, although scattered over the whole world, even to the extremities of the earth, has received from the Apostles and their disciples, the FAITH, viz. on one God the FATHER, almighty, that made the heaven and the earth, and the seas, and all things therein—and on one CHRIST JESUS, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation—and on the HOLY SPIRIT, who, by the prophets, preached the dispensations, and the advents, and the generation from a Virgin, and the suffering, and the resurrection from the dead, and the assumption, in flesh, into heaven, of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ; and his coming

again from the heavens in the glory of the Father, to sum up all things, and raise all flesh of all mankind ; that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the good pleasure of his father who is invisible, every knee may bow, of beings in heaven, in earth, and under the earth ; and every tongue may confess to him ; and that he may exercise righteous judgment upon all ; may send spiritual wickednesses, and transgressing and apostate angels, and ungodly, and unjust, and lawless, and blasphemous men, into eternal fire. But on the righteous and holy—on those who have kept his commandments and continued in his love, whether from the beginning or after repentance, may, with the gift of life, bestow incorruption, and put them in possession of eternal glory.”

“ This faith,” proceeds Irenæus, “ the church, as I said before, has received, and though dispersed over the whole world, assiduously preserves as if she inhabited a single house ; and believes in these things as having but one heart and one soul : and with perfect harmony proclaims, teaches, hands down, these things as though she had but one mouth. For though there are various and dissimilar languages in the world ; yet the power of the faith transmitted is one and the same. Neither the

churches in *Germany*, nor in *Iberia*," (*Spain*) "nor among the *Celtæ*," (in *France*) "nor in the *East*, nor in *Egypt*, nor in *Libya*, nor in the middle regions of the world," (*Jerusalem* and the adjacent districts) "believe or teach any other doctrines. But as the Sun is one and the same throughout the whole world; so the preaching of the truth shines everywhere, and enlightens all men who are willing to come to the knowledge of truth. Nor will the most powerful in speech among the governors of the churches say anything more than these; (for no one can be above his master; nor the most feeble anything less. For as there is but one faith, he who is "able to speak much cannot enlarge; nor he who can say little, diminish it."

It is clear that this venerable father did not mean to give the very words of any formula of faith; but to state, substantially, those high and leading truths in which all the churches of Christ over the whole world harmonized; and which formed the *doctrinal* bond of their union.

It is also certain, that as heresies, corrupting any *cardinal* principle of Christianity, arose in the church, her public profession met them by an open and decisive assertion of the injured truth. This necessarily enlarged, by

degrees, the number of articles in her creed, as well as the scope of her ministerial instruction. But her maintenance of the faith was always pointed and brief. She never launched out into wide discussion; never pursued principles to their remote consequences; nor embarrassed her testimony by numerous and minute applications. These were left then as they ought to be now, and in the nature of things, must be, in a very great measure, to the intelligence and fidelity of her ministry. But the basis of her communion was laid so broad, in the vital doctrines of the gospel, that all who "held the head," in whatever spot of the globe, might join, as they had opportunity, in the reciprocation of Christian kindnesses, and the enjoyment of Christian privileges. For proof of this a single fact will suffice. The most copious of all her confessions, framed toward the close of the fourth century, or about A. D. 373, nearly two hundred years after Irenæus, was designed, expressly to guard and vindicate the common faith against the numerous heresies of the age. "All the orthodox bishops," says EPIPHANIUS, "and, in a word, the whole catholic church, in opposition to these heresies, and conformably to the pre-established faith of those holy fathers" (the

Apostles and their successors) “affirm and maintain as follows; *We believe,*” &c.

He then recites the creed at length. It is substantially the same with the one already quoted; to the specifications of which it gives greater amplitude, and closer application. Yet this *enlarged* creed would not fill, or more than fill, **THREE PAGES** of the present work!!

It is now apparent in what the *doctrinal* unity of the primitive church consisted. It was in holding and professing the same faith on points immediately affecting our eternal hope.

2d. The *second* principle of her unity was found in her *common institutions*.

These, again, without descending to subordinate variations or local observances, were her ministry, her worshipping assemblies, and her sacraments.

Whatever alterations passed, in process of time, upon the *form* of her ministry and worship, there was no place nor period, in which their *substance* was not accounted sacred. On the one hand she resisted, with jealous promptitude every *intrusion* into her official functions; and, on the other, her ministers were ministers of her whole body, and so acknowledged and employed wherever they happened to be, under such restrictions only as prudence rendered it necessary to impose for the preservation of pub-

lic order. A minister and a ministry she understood not. It was *one*. To interdict a minister of the gospel, with suitable credentials, from preaching or other service of the sanctuary in any particular church whatever, on the pretence of its being *unlawful* to receive him and to join with him in ministerial communion, she would have held in abomination. Severance of church from church—worship from worship—sacraments from sacraments, under the notion of *separate* Christian interests, and the denial of reciprocal fellowship, she condemned and detested. CYPRIAN's treatise on the unity of the church; and his correspondence relative to the Novation schism, will satisfy any candid man of the truth of this representation. Proofs in detail is forborne at present, as it will be incorporated with subsequent matter; and will thus prevent a needless if not wearisome repetition.

3d. The *third* great point of primitive unity was, *brotherly love*.

Let brotherly love continue; was an injunction among the last which proceeded from the sanctified lips of Paul the Apostle, the aged, the martyr. And for the best of reasons. It is a lesson the most likely to be forgotten, and the most important to be remembered, of all the practical lessons which have been given to

the children of men. The most likely to be forgotten : because every form and particle of their depravity has an interest in counteracting it—the most important to be remembered : because it is the principal proof of their reconciliation and communion with God, and the mainspring of their happiness both in this life and that which is to come. Hatred, and her whole brood of envyings, strifes, clamors, jealousies, discords, are from hell—the undisputed progeny of Satan—Charity, with her gentleness, kindness, long-suffering, mercies, meekness, and the whole train of personal loveliness and social graces, are from above ; the fair and guileless offspring of the “ Father of lights.” The very end of the Redeemer’s mission—the ultimate object of his doctrines, his precepts, his example, his tears, his sacrifice, was to overthrow the reign of malice, and to rear upon its ruins the empire of love. *For this purpose was the Son of God, manifested, that he might destroy the works of the Devil.* But God is love ; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him. On the contrary, he that loveth not, knoweth not God. Thence the emphasis of those memorable words of the LORD JESUS ; *Hereby shall all men KNOW that ye are MY disciples, if ye have LOVE one to another.* In fact, the religion which he has instituted and which

his Spirit teaches, is the *only religion* upon the face of the earth which makes LOVE its principle. Even Justification by faith is related to love as a means to an end. It is he who "believeth God," that worketh righteousness, and loves his neighbor.

In this divine quality of their religion the primitive Christians shone forth with a lustre which eclipses and darkens the church of modern days. That there existed then, as there exist now, whisperings, and backbitings, and evil surmises—that Jealousy raised strife, and ambition parties—that the simple followed where the crafty led—that Zeal often lent herself to vain glory rather than to godly edifying; while Truth frowned and Charity wept, is very certain. Absolute freedom from those ungracious tempers which divide and alienate even the wise and good, is for the heavenly state. It belongs not to flesh and blood: to men of "like passions;" and those passions too often sinful.

Yet with all her imperfections on this point; with all the wranglings and schisms which sprung up in her bosom, the primitive church, *as a whole*, presented a family picture which should make us blush; and *would* make us blush, if we had not, by inveterate habits of collision, and by the artifice of bestowing hal-

lowed names upon unhallowed things, rid ourselves, in a great degree, of Christian shame. That which was the *exception* among the "elders," seems to be the *rule* among the moderns. Their concord was the rule, their disagreements the exception; our concord is the exception, our disagreements the rule. We should feel it to be a cruel satire, were any one to say of us, as the Pagans did of the early believers, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!"

In this fraternal affection did they account much of their unity to consist. Their most distinguished men labored unweariedly to preserve and promote it: and did not hesitate to pronounce the violation of it to be a practical renunciation of Christianity itself.

As the truth of this representation is generally admitted, since it is everywhere the theme of Christian panegyric, no authorities are quoted to support it: for it would be idle to prove what nobody denies. Yet if the reader should be at all sceptical, he shall have his doubts removed by what is to follow—the proof of some other matters necessarily involving the proof of this also. Its use in the main question before us will be seen in due time. Proceed we, then, to inquire,

2. By what the primitive church considered her unity as liable to be broken.

It may not be amiss to begin, after the good old way ; and shew, *negatively*, what she did *not* reckon as breaches of unity. In this predicament, she comprehended all varieties of opinion and observance which do not subvert the foundation of evangelical truth and order. All which do not impeach a man's claim to the character of a sincere disciple of the Lord Jesus. Whatever they were, within these limits they did not, in her judgment, dissolve the bonds of her union : by none of them was it impaired.

Not by a difference in *rites and customs in worship*—

Nor by *imperfections in moral discipline*—

Nor by diversities in the *form of government*—

Nor by dissonant views on *subordinate points of doctrine*.

1st. Not by a difference in *rites and customs in worship*.

That there were discordant practices even in the Apostolic church itself, is clear from the records of the New Testament ; and equally clear that they were not allowed to interrupt the harmony of her communion. A great part of Paul's argument, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, ch. xi. concerning the decorum

which the sexes ought to study in their modes of dress when engaged in public worship, rests upon the habits of society. Now these, in so far as they interfered neither with the ordinances of worship, nor with pure morals, might very innocently vary in various places. He winds up his remarks, after freely giving his opinion on the question of propriety at that time among the Corinthians, by saying, *If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.* “A contentious man,” it is *Calvin’s* comment; “A contentious man is one who wantonly stirs up strife, regardless of the prevalence of truth. Such are all they who, without necessity, carp at good and useful rites,” &c. From the words of the Apostle one thing is plain; viz. that matters of secondary moment, relating even to the worship of God, are no justifiable cause of “contention” among Christians.

Does this construction appear too bold and too broad? It shall be confirmed by Paul himself. Wide differences of opinion and practice existed between Christians in his time about the distinction of meats and of days which were established under the Jewish dispensation. The discreet Apostle, aware of men’s propensity to bend everything to their own rule, with very little regard to the feel-

ings of others ; and to array their uncharitableness in the livery of zeal for *religion*, interposes to prevent the sacrifice of one party to the rashness or vanity of the other ; telling them that they might both serve God acceptably. *He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord : and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord ; for he giveth God thanks : and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not ; and giveth God thanks.* Be it so, that Christians or Christian churches have scruples and attachments which neither go the whole length of evangelical freedom, nor even rise up to the height of evangelical purity—be it so, that they who see these infirmities are themselves of clearer light, stronger faith, and larger liberty. Yet they may not, says Paul, pour contempt upon their brethren : much less stand at a haughty distance, as if they were not disciples of a common master. Nor, may those of less attainments, “ the weak,” as Paul terms them, indulge even in a censorious temper toward the others. Instead of such unseemliness, let us judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way. “ O Christians,” exclaims he, “ your best interests are untouched by these inferior disagreements. *The kingdom of God is not*

meat and drink ; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things, viz. righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, serveth Christ, is ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, and approved of men. Laying aside, therefore, all janglings and heart-burnings about other matters, let us follow after the things which make for PEACE ; and things where-with one may EDIFY, may build up, not pull down, another. This was Paul's advice concerning disputes about the religious distinction of meats and days. And when the contest relative to circumcision had created warm blood between Christians, he pursued the same healing course. Perpetually calling them off from their subaltern polemics to their great concern, which was worth fighting, and bleeding, and burning for—he cries out, Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing ; but keeping of the commandments of God—is—everything ! And again, In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision but a NEW CREATURE. And as many as walk according to this rule, viz. that it is the being a new creature in Christ Jesus, which contains the pith and marrow, the vigor and glory of our good confession, peace be on them and mercy ! Circumcised or uncircumcised ; laying stress upon this custom, or laying none, I have no

quarrel with them; nor ought others to have any. For notwithstanding this dissent, they all are *the Israel of God*; and such they shall be found and acknowledged to be, when many who are at daggers-drawing about the carnal rite shall be disowned by their Judge. For my own part, saith the Apostle, I have things of much higher moment to fill up my heart, my hours, and my efforts. *I am set for the defence of the Gospel*; and will not descend to these petty conflicts. My back scarred with the scourge, my limbs bruised with stones, for the cross of Christ, will shew whether my resolution proceeds from a selfish motive, or from a proper estimate of a cause which will justify and repay my sufferings. *From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.* Sage and Hero! every man in whose heart the love of Jesus reigns, would fly to “kiss thy lips for giving so right an answer.”

As was his doctrine, so was his example. He circumcised Timothy to sooth a Jewish prejudice—he submitted, by the advice of the Presbyters at Jerusalem, to a useless but harmless ceremony, in “purifying himself” along with “four men who had a vow on them;” for the express purpose of disproving the charge of his making war upon the “customs”

—religious customs—customs belonging to *divine worship*, which converts from the Jews had retained from the ancient ceremonial. Summarily, he accommodated himself to all classes of men, and all their customs, whenever such courtesy did not imply a surrender of truth. About customs *as* customs he strove not. Yet this same condescending, accommodating Paul, who went every length consistently with the safety of *substantial* principles, would not stir a hair's breadth at the hazard of injuring *them*. Here he was unyielding, unmanageable, inexorable as Death. Upon such terms, however innocent, or even laudable, customs and rites might be in themselves; however dear to a tender but misguided conscience, his maxim was—"Touch not, taste not, handle not." Remove this single objection—shew that his compliance was not exacted as an *approbation*—that no vital truth was to be wounded—and, "to the Jew he became as a Jew—to those under the law, as under the law—to those without the law, as without the law—to all men all things"—for what purpose? To "gain some"—to promote the *common* salvation! This is *that* Paul the Apostle!

The same spirit animated the church after he had left it. When the Jewish controversy

was settled forever, there was still a variety of observances in different places. They *necessarily* arose out of different climate, previous habits, social institutions, national character; and were as necessarily continued, and naturally increased. The general fact is stated and explained in the ecclesiastical histories which are in every one's hands. They produced, however, no discord nor inconvenience, till about the middle of the second century, when sharp and vehement contests arose between the Asiatic and western Christians about the celebration of *Easter*. The former keeping this feast on the fourteenth day of the first Jewish month, at the time that the Jews celebrated their passover, *three days* before the anniversary of Christ's resurrection; the latter keeping it on the night *immediately preceding* that anniversary. This difference may appear very trifling to those who do not observe Easter at all; but to the primitive Christians it was far from being a trifle. Their devotional habits in many things inaccurate, and in this among the rest, made it a question of high importance. Yet though neither party yielded to the other, they did not, on that account, break the bonds of charity.

Toward the end of the century, Victor, bishop of Rome, as bishops were in those days,

undertook to force upon the Asiatic Christians the custom of the west ; and on their refusing to comply, “ broke communion with them, pronounced them unworthy the name of brethren, and excluded them from all fellowship with the church of Rome.” But Victor and his associates were obliged to give back ; and both sides “ retained their own customs until the fourth century, when the council of Nice abolished that of the Asiatics, and rendered the time of the celebration of Easter the same through all the Christian churches.”

There is extant on this subject a fragment of Irenæus, being part of a letter which he wrote in his own name, and the name of his brethren, to Victor ; and which had great influence in healing the breach. It is worth inserting.

After admonishing Victor that he ought not, for such a reason, “ to cut off from communion whole churches of God who observed the custom handed down from their ancestors,” he adds :

“ Not only is there a controversy about the day, but about the very form, of the fast. For some think it ought to be kept for one day, others for two, others even for several ; others measure for their term forty hours, including both night and day. And this variety among

those who keep it, has not originated in our times, but prevailed long before us; our predecessors, it seems, not having been very scrupulous with regard to accuracy; but having adopted their custom in their simplicity and according to their peculiar feelings, handed it down, thus diversified, to the succeeding age. But all these were not, therefore, the less at peace among themselves, nor are we. *The difference about the fast commends the agreement in the faith.*

“The Presbyters, who, before *Soter*, ruled the church which you now govern; we mean *Anicetus*, and *Pius*, and *Hyginus*, and *Telesphorus*, and *Xystus*, neither observed themselves, nor permitted their people to observe, the day which is kept by the Asiatic Christians: and, nevertheless, while they did not observe that day, they maintained peace with the other Presbyters who did, when they visited them; although the observance was more obnoxious to them, than the non-observance to the Asiatics; yet never were any, on account of this diversity, cast out of the church. But the Presbyters who preceded you, and did not keep the day, *Sent the Eucharist to those who did.* And when blessed *Polycarp* went on a journey to Rome in the time of *Anicetus*, and they had some little difference about other

matters, they immediately dropped it for the sake of peace ; and would by no means cherish contention on this head. Anicetus could not, indeed, persuade Polycarp to relinquish his observance ; as having always kept it with John, the disciple of the Lord, and the other Apostles with whom he had been conversant. Nor did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to adopt it, as he pleaded for the necessity of retaining the custom of the Presbyters who had gone before him. Yet while things were in this state, they *held communion with each other*. And in the church, Anicetus, from pure respect, *yielded to Polycarp the dispensation of the Eucharist*, and they amicably separated from each other ; and the peace of the whole church was preserved, both by those who kept the day, and those who did not." Thus Irenæus.

In the next century there was a keen controversy concerning the validity of baptism administered by heretics, as well as concerning their readmission into the Catholic church. Stephanus, bishop of Rome, had acted with hauteur and even violence towards the celebrated Cyprian. This drew from Firmilianus bishop of Cæsarea in Cappadocia, about A. D. 256, a letter to Cyprian, in which is the following statement :

" But that they who are at Rome do not en-

tirely observe all things which have been handed down from the beginning; and that they appeal in vain to Apostolic authority for their own usages, any one may know from the fact of his seeing that there are some differences among them about the days on which the Paschal feast" (before Easter) "is to be kept; and about *many other particulars of divine worship*; and that they have not precisely the same observances there as prevail in Jerusalem. So likewise, in a very great number of other provinces, *many things vary according to the diversity of place and people*; but nevertheless these variations have at no time infringed the peace and unity of the Catholic church: which Stephanus has now dared to do; breaking that peace, in regard to you, which his predecessors always maintained with you," (the African churches) "in mutual love and honor."

The great AUGUSTINE, bishop of Hippo, who flourished in the latter part of the fourth, and beginning of the fifth century, has settled this question with equal perspicuity and precision.

"Concerning the various observances in various places," says he, "there is one most wholesome rule to be followed: Wherever we see or know to be instituted customs which are not contrary to the faith, nor to good mo-

rals, and have any tendency to promote amendment of life, we ought, instead of disapproving, to commend and imitate them, if the infirmity of some do not oppose such a hindrance as shall produce more harm than our compliance can do good."

Again: "I have often perceived, with pain and grief, that weak Christians are exceedingly disturbed by the contentious obstinacy or superstitious timidity of *some brethren*, who, in matters of this sort, which cannot be certainly determined either by the authority of the Holy Scripture, or tradition of the universal church, or any utility in the reformation of life—led away by some petty reasoning of their own, or because they have been accustomed to see it so in their own country; or because they may have met with it in their travels, and fancy themselves so much the wiser—raise such litigious questions, as to think nothing right but what they do themselves."

The venerable father has given us not merely his own judgment, but, indirectly, the judgment of the whole Catholic church. For he says that they were only "*some brethren*;" and those either "obstinate," or "superstitiously timid," or "conceited," who created any contention about difference of rites. With the church at large, then, there was

none: but they concurred with him in the opinion, that in all such things “there is no course more becoming a dignified and prudent Christian, than to conform to the practice of that particular church which he may happen to visit.”

2d. The primitive church did not consider her unity as broken, nor a sufficient cause of interrupting communion as afforded, by *imperfection in her moral discipline.*

That all the doctrines, precepts, promises, and threatenings of God’s word, and all the institutions of his house, are designed and calculated to produce universal purity in heart and life, admits of no more doubt than the existence of the Bible. For this purpose he has invested the governors of the church with authority, and made it their indispensable duty, not only to instruct their people in “whatever things are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report;” but to enforce their instructions by vigilant pastoral inspection, and by moral coercion of delinquents. And for the execution of this, no less than of every other, part of their trust, they shall render an account to the Judge of the quick and dead. Yet he has himself informed them that the complete prevention or cure of abuses and scandals is beyond their reach—that those will

be so mingled with the wheat as to render their separation, by human hands, impracticable without the hazard of rooting up the wheat also—and that while, in the *wise* performance of their duty, they are to do the best which their circumstances permit, they must wait for the entire purgation of the church till the second coming of the SON OF MAN, who shall then “send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them who do iniquity.”

Nevertheless there have not been wanting in the church of God attempts to effect what his word pronounces to be impossible. Zeal without knowledge—the generous but untrained ardor of juvenile reformers, who can be taught by experience alone, that “old Adam is too hard for young Melancthon”—the well meant but visionary projects of recluse devotion estranged from real life, and from the world, even the Christian world, as it actually exists—and, not unfrequently, that pragmatistical officiousness which proclaims, with JEHU, “Come and see my zeal for the Lord!” and offers piles of incense on the altar of its own vanity, for every shred which it strews on the altar of God—all these things have set men at work to find or to erect an immaculate church. The success of the experiment has been

worthy of its wit. But though it always has failed, and will forever fail, of accomplishing its professed aim ; it never has failed, and never will fail, of producing one deplorable consequence. It engenders and nourishes a morbid humor, an unhappy fastidiousness, which make the religious temperament extremely irritable ; fill the mind with disgust, and the mouth with complaint ; and finally break up, or forbid, Christian fellowship under the pretence of superior purity ; but, in very deed, for faults, if not trivial in themselves, yet too often trivial in comparison with the faults of the complainers.

But such causes of disunion or disaffection between churches ; or of the withdrawing of individuals from communion, provided nothing sinful be *imposed* on them, receive no countenance from the judgment or example of the primitive Christians.

We know that grievous abuses prevailed in several even of the Apostolic churches—Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, Crete, Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea, were all stained in their discipline ; some of them with very foul blots, as every one conversant in the New Testament knows. They were admonished, reproved, threatened by the Lord Jesus himself, through his servants Paul and John ;

yet there is not a syllable enjoining upon others the disruption of communion with them ; nor on the purer part of any of them to withdraw from the more depraved majority. On the contrary, the faithful few in Thyatira are simply encouraged and commanded to hold fast their integrity and their testimony. Nor is there a single instance of Christ's directing his people, or any portion of them, to break off church communion by their own act, except in the case of their departure from apostate Rome. Now, although no conclusion can be drawn from these facts in favor of negligence, sloth, or other corruption in maintaining the law of God's house, yet they do show that, Christ Jesus himself being Judge, it is the duty of Christians rather to endeavor to rectify irregularities, than by deserting or disowning churches in which they prevail, to remove, as much as in them lies, the only human restraint upon the career of iniquity, and suffer it to "drown in destruction and perdition," all the remaining interest and glory of his cross.

By this rule did the church walk after the days of the Apostles. Over the dishonor brought upon her name by the misconduct of some who bore it, did the noblest of her sons mourn ; but they never thought of setting up

separate communions. Sore as was their affliction on her account, they did not, in their haste, betake themselves to a remedy more fatal than the disease. Their scrupulousness on this head was the more remarkable, as there was much greater aberration from correct conduct among both clergy and laity, in the third century, than perhaps would be tolerated now in either by any evangelical church. And yet the most learned, laborious, holy men—the most stern reprovers of public declension, were the champions of *one* communion; and the most strenuous opposers of schism and separation.

The Novatian sect, which carried its rigor so far as to shut the doors of readmission upon the *lapsed*, however penitent, refused to hold communion with the rest of the church expressly on account of her alleged corruptions. It was against them that CYPRIAN wrote his treatise on *the Unity of the Church*: the whole bent of which is to show that their separation was unscriptural and unlawful; and that they who will not hold communion with all and every part of the Catholic church, cast themselves out of her pale, and forfeit their share in her benefits. He urges the same doctrine in many of his letters. Take an example:

“Although tares appear in the church,

neither our faith nor our charity ought to be so hindered thereby, as that we should go out of the church because we perceive the tares to be in it. Our duty is to labor that we may be of the wheat; so that when the wheat shall be gathered into the Lord's garner, we may reap the fruit of our work. The Apostle says, *that in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor and some to dishonor.* Let us, therefore, do our diligence, and labor with all our might, that we may be golden or silver vessels. But to break the earthen vessels belongs only to the Lord, in whose hands is the *rod of iron*. The servant cannot be greater than his master; nor may any one claim to himself what the FATHER hath given to the SON alone; so as to imagine that he possesses ability to ventilate and 'purge the floor;' or, by human judgment, to separate universally the tares from the wheat. By such an attempt men display only a proud obstinacy and a sacrilegious presumption, the effect of depraved frenzy. And while they assume to themselves a power beyond the claims of mild righteousness, they *perish from the church*.

The DONATISTS in Africa, treading in the steps of the Novatians, set up a sectarian communion upon the very same pretext. "The

church was polluted—there were bad men in her fellowship—their consciences would not permit them to remain, lest they should be contaminated.” Such were the alleged reasons of their schism. We know in what light their conduct was viewed. AUGUSTINE, their chief antagonist, and a formidable one he was, quotes CYPRIAN, to prove that he was only maintaining the doctrine which had been maintained before, and was the received doctrine among Christians. “In his letter to Antonius,” says Augustine, “he shows that before the final separation of the just and the unjust, *we are in no manner to withdraw from the unity of the church, on account of the commixture of bad men with good*”—and then transcribes a passage of the same purport, and nearly in the same words; though, if possible, still more pointed than the one above.

In another tract he goes yet further. “I do not say that I am to deny the communion of the Donatists to be of the church of Christ, because some who were bishops among them are convicted by ecclesiastical and civil processes of having burnt the sacred volumes—or because they did not carry their point in the trial by the bishops which they craved from the Emperor—or because, on their appeal to himself, they received from him a sentence of

condemnation—or because there are among them leaders of the *Circumcelliones*—or because the *Circumcelliones* commit such atrocious crimes—or because some of them throw themselves headlong over precipices; or rush into the flames which they have kindled for themselves; or, by terrifying threats, compel others to massacre them, and court so many spontaneous and furious deaths, that they may be revered as saints and martyrs—or because drunken herds of male and female vagrants flock to their sepulchres, and there, by day and by night, revel in wine and wickedness and corrupt themselves by the most flagitious enormities. Let all that rabble pass for their chaff, nor be of any prejudice to their wheat, if themselves adhere to the church of God.”

He elsewhere addresses the Donatists in this animated style :

“ You maintain that by the contagion of wicked Africans,” (i. e. by holding communion with the African churches, which the Donatists pronounced to be too impure for *their* fellowship) “ by the contagion of wicked Africans, the church has perished from the face of the earth, excepting what remains in the party of Donatus, as in the ‘ wheat ’ separated from ‘ tares and chaff,’ against the express declaration of Cyprian, who says, that neither

do good men perish from the church on account of their commixture with the bad; nor can these same bad men be separated from their mixture with the good before the time of the divine Judgment. You are, therefore, according to your error, or rather madness, compelled to embrace in your accusation, all the churches of which we read in the apostolic and canonical scriptures—the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Thessalonians, Colossians, Philippians—the church of Jerusalem, Antioch, Smyrna, Thyatira, Sardis, Pergamos, Philadelphia, Laodicea—So many other churches of Pontus, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia; and all that range of country from Jerusalem unto Illyricum, which Paul testifies he had filled with the gospel: not to mention other regions of wide extent, into which the church, planted by Apostolic labors, has spread herself, and where she has grown and is growing still. Certainly all the churches here enumerated from the holy scriptures, situated so far from Africa, you are obliged to accuse as having perished through the sins of their African brethren. But the more easily to refute your error—even those Africans whose sin you dare falsely to charge upon other nations—even those very Africans, I say, we are under no necessity of defending. If they are

innocent, they are sharers with those transmarine churches in the kingdom of God—If guilty, they share with them as tares with the wheat; nor shall they be able to hurt, in Africa itself, those who, *although* KNOWING *their character, will not, on their account, separate themselves from the unity of the church.*”

Than this testimony nothing more ample and decisive can be desired. It establishes the great fact, that the principles and conduct of the Donatists with regard to communion, Christian and ministerial, were at war with the faith and practice of the whole church of God. Otherwise they could not have condemned that church as having perished through the corruption of her unworthy members, nor have been themselves condemned as having unjustifiably withdrawn from her communion. And wherein their general principles and practice in this matter, and their reasonings in defence of both, differ from those of such churches as will hold no communion but with the members of their own sect, let those good and pure-intentioned men who defend the restriction, most solemnly consider. In one thing there is, indeed, a remarkable difference. The latter acknowledge as true churches and exemplary Christians, many whose communion they notwithstanding reject. But the former saw

that such a concession overturns the very foundation upon which a separate communion is reared. They, therefore, carried their principles through; and, in order to justify their schism, maintained that all but their own *had ceased to be true churches*. On this head, the palm of consistency, at least, must be awarded to the *Donatists*!

3d. Varieties of opinion and practice, with respect to the *modifications of her external order*, were not considered by the primitive church as inconsistent with her unity.

That there were such varieties; that the government of the church gradually altered from the apostolic form; and sooner in some places than in others; so that there were in actual existence at the same moment different forms of government in different parts of the church, all dissentients from the hierarchy agree. If, from the very days of the Apostles downwards for more than fifteen hundred years, her order was uninterruptedly episcopal, as many advocates of episcopacy maintain; although even such an argument could not be admitted against *scriptural* proof, yet it would be extremely embarrassing to their opponents. The difficulty of explaining so strange a phenomenon, would create in conscientious men a fear that there must be some

mistake in such a construction of holy writ as should be thwarted by it; and incline their minds to an interpretation with which it should be found to accord. The difficulty, however, does not exist. Stubborn facts in the history of the church refute the episcopal plea; and prove that her prelatical constitution was the result of changes which it required ages to effect.

It would be foreign from our purpose to investigate this proposition at large. Only a few facts shall be adduced to show that it has not been lightly advanced.

In the fourth century, JEROME, “who, in the judgment of Erasmus, was, without controversy, by far the most learned and most eloquent of all the Christians, and the prince of Christian divines,” taught the same thing. His testimony, and the substance of the reasoning upon it, are extracted from the second volume of the Christian’s Magazine.

“Thus he lays down both *doctrine* and *fact* relative to the government of the church, in his commentary on Titus, i. 5.

“*That thou shouldest ordain Presbyters in every city, as I had appointed thee.* ‘What sort of Presbyters ought to be ordained he shows afterwards—*If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, &c., and then adds, for a bishop must*

be blameless, as the steward of God, &c. A Presbyter, therefore, is the same as a bishop : and before there were, by the instigation of the devil, parties in religion ; and it was said among different people, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, the churches were governed by the joint counsel of the Presbyters. But afterwards, when every one accounted those whom he baptized as belonging to himself and not to Christ, it was decreed throughout the whole world, that one, chosen from among the Presbyters, should be put over the rest, and that the whole care of the church should be committed to him, and the seeds of schisms taken away.

‘ Should any one think that this is my private opinion, and not the doctrine of the Scriptures, let him read the words of the Apostle in his epistle to the Philippians, ‘ Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons,’ &c. Philippi is a *single* city of Macedonia ; and certainly in one city there could not be *several bishops*, as they are now styled ; but as they, at that time, called the very same persons bishops whom they called Presbyters, the Apostle has spoken without distinction of bishops as Presbyters.

‘ Should this matter yet appear doubtful to

any one, unless it be proved by an additional testimony; it is written in the acts of the Apostles, that when Paul had come to Miletum, he sent to Ephesus and called the Presbyters of that church, and among other things said to them, ‘take heed to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops.

Take particular notice, that calling the PRESBYTERS of the single city of Ephesus, he afterwards names the same persons BISHOPS.’ After further quotations from the epistle to the Hebrews, and from Peter, he proceeds: ‘Our intention in these remarks is to show that among the ancients, *Presbyters and Bishops were THE VERY SAME*. But that BY LITTLE AND LITTLE, that the plants of dissensions might be plucked up, the whole concern was devolved upon an individual. As the Presbyters, therefore, KNOW that they are subjected, BY THE CUSTOM OF THE CHURCH, to him who is set over them; so let the Bishops know, that they are greater than Presbyters, MORE BY CUSTOM than by ANY REAL APPOINTMENT OF CHRIST.’

“He pursues the same argument with great point, in his famous epistle to Evagrius, asserting and proving from the Scriptures, that in the beginning, and during the Apostles’ days, a Bishop and a Presbyter were the same

thing. He then goes on : ‘ As to the fact, that **AFTERWARDS** one was **ELECTED** to preside over the rest, this was done as a remedy against schism ; lest every one, drawing his proselytes to himself, should rend the church of Christ. For even at Alexandria, from the Evangelist Mark to the Bishops Heraclas and Dionysius, the Presbyters always chose one of their number, placed him in a superior station, and gave him the title of Bishop : in the same manner as if an army should **MAKE** an emperor, or the deacons should choose from among themselves one whom they knew to be particularly active, and should call him **ARCH-DEACON**. For, excepting ordination, what is done by a Bishop which may not be done by a Presbyter ? Nor is it to be supposed, that the church should be one thing at Rome, and another in all the world besides. Both France, and Britain, and Africa, and Persia, and the East, and India, and all the barbarous nations, worship one Christ, observe one rule of truth. If you demand authority, the globe is greater than a city. Wherever a Bishop shall be found, whether at Rome, or Eugubium, or Constantinople or Rhegium, or Alexandria, or Tanis, he has the same pretensions, the same priesthood.’ Observe,

“ 1. Jerome expressly denies the superi-

erity of Bishops to Presbyters, by *divine right*. To prove his assertion on this head, he goes directly to the Scriptures ; and argues, as the advocates of party do, from the interchangeable titles of Bishop and Presbyter ; from the *directions* given to them without the least intimation of difference in their authority ; and from the *powers* of Presbyters undisputed in this day.

“ 2. JEROME states it as a *historical fact*, that, in the original constitution of the church, before the devil had as much influence as he acquired afterwards *the churches were governea by the joint counsels of the Presbyters*.

“ 3. JEROME states it as a *historical fact*, that this government of the churches, *by Presbyters alone*, continued until, for the avoiding of scandalous quarrels and schisms, it was thought expedient to *alter* it. ‘ *Afterwards,*’ says he, ‘ when every one accounted those whom he baptized as belonging to himself and not to Christ, it was *decreed throughout the whole world*, that one, chosen from among the Presbyters, should be put over the rest ; and that the whole care of the church should be committed to him.’

“ 4. JEROME states it as a *historical fact*, that this change in the government of the church—this creation of a superior order of ministers, took place, not at once, but *by degrees*—‘ *Paul-*

atim,’ says he, ‘by little and little.’ The precise date on which this innovation upon primitive order *commenced*, he does not mention ; but he says positively, that it did not take place till the factious spirit of the Corinthians had spread itself in different countries, to an alarming extent. ‘*In populis,*’ is his expression. Assuredly, this was not the work of a day. It had not been accomplished when the apostolic epistles were written, because Jerome appeals to these for proof that the churches were then governed by the joint counsels of Presbyters ; and it is incredible that such ruinous dissensions, had they existed, should not have been noticed in letters to others beside the Corinthians. The disease, indeed, was of a nature to spread rapidly ; but still it must have had time to travel. With all the zeal of Satan himself, and of a parcel of wicked or foolish clergymen to help him, it could not march from people to people, and clime to clime, but in a course of years.

“ 5. JEROME states as *historical facts*, that the elevation of one Presbyter over the others, was a *human contrivance* ;—was not *imposed* by authority, but *crept in by custom* ; and that the Presbyters of his day *knew* this very well. ‘*As therefore,*’ says he, ‘*the Presbyters KNOW that they are subjected to their superior by cus-*

TOM ; so let the bishops know that they are above the Presbyters, rather by the **CUSTOM OF THE CHURCH**, than by the Lord's appointment.

“ 6. **JEROME** states it as a *historical fact*, that the first bishops were made by the *Presbyters themselves* ; and consequently they could neither have, nor communicate any authority above that of Presbyters. ‘ *Afterwards,*’ says he, ‘ to prevent schism, one was *elected* to preside over the rest.’ Elected and commissioned by whom ? By the *Presbyters* : for he immediately gives you a broad fact, which it is impossible to explain away. ‘ At Alexandria,’ he tells you, ‘ from the evangelist Mark, to the Bishops Heraclas and Dionysius,’ i. e. till about the middle of the third century, ‘ the Presbyters *always chose* one of their number, *placed him in a superior station*, and gave him the title of *Bishop.*’

“ 7. **JEROME** states it as a *historical fact*, that even in his own day, that is, toward the end of the fourth century, there was no power, excepting ordination, exercised by a Bishop, which might not be exercised by a Presbyter. ‘ What does a Bishop,’ he asks, ‘ excepting ordination, which a Presbyter *may not do* ?’

“ Two observations force themselves upon us.

“ 1st. Jerome challenges the whole world,

to show in what prerogative a Presbyter was, at *that time*, inferior to a Bishop, excepting the single power of ordination. A challenge which common sense would have repressed, had public opinion concerning the *rights* of Presbyters allowed it to be successfully met.

“2d. Although it appears from Jerome himself, that the prelates were not then in the habit of associating the Presbyters with themselves, in an equal right of *government*, yet, as he told the former, to their faces, that the right was undeniable, and ought to be respected by them, it presents us with a strong fact in the *progress* of Episcopacy. Here was a power in Presbyters, which, though undisputed, lay, for the most part, dormant. The transition from disuse to denial, and from denial to extinction, of powers which the possessors have not vigilance, integrity, or spirit to enforce, is natural, short, and rapid. According to Jerome’s declaration, the hierarchy did not pretend to the exclusive right of government. Therefore, there was but *half* a hierarchy, according to the present system. That the Bishops had, some time after, the powers of ordination and government both, is clear. How did they acquire the monopoly? By apostolic institution? No. Jerome refutes that opinion from the Scriptures and history.

By apostolic tradition? No. For, in the latter part of the fourth century, their single prerogative over Presbyters was the power of ordination. Government was at first exercised by the Presbyters in common. When they had, by their own act, placed a superior over their own heads, they rewarded his distinction, his toils, and his perils, with a proportionate reverence; they grew slack about the maintenance of troublesome privilege; till at length their courtesy, their indolence, their love of peace, or their hope of promotion, permitted their high and venerable trust to glide into the hands of the prelates. We have no doubt that the course of the *ordaining power* was similar, though swifter."

"This testimony of Jerome is seconded by a more full one of Eutychius, Patriarch of Alexandria, who, out of the Records and Traditions of that church, in his Arabick Originals thereof, saith, (according to Selden's Translation in his Comment. p. 29, 30.) 'Mark the Evangelist ordained, along with *Hananiah*, twelve Presbyters, who were always to remain with the Patriarch; so that when the Patriarchate should be vacant, they should elect, from the twelve Presbyters, one *on whose head the other eleven should impose their hands and bless him, and create him Patriarch*; and then should choose

some other distinguished man, as a fellow Presbyter, in the place of him who was thus made Patriarch, so that their number should always be twelve. Nor did this institution concerning the Presbyters, viz. that *the Patriarch should be created from these Presbyters, go into disuse before the time of ALEXANDER, Patriarch of Alexandria, 318. He forbade the Presbyters to create a Patriarch from that time: and decreed, that on the death of one Patriarch, the Bishops should meet and ordain his successor. He also decreed that, in case of a vacancy, they should, without regard to place, choose either from among these twelve Presbyters or any others, some man of peculiar worth and give him the title of Patriarch. And thus vanished that more ancient institution, according to which the Patriarch used to be created by Presbyters; and in its place came the above decree for creating him by Bishops.*

“Here is a full proof of Presbyters choosing and creating their Bishop, (whom Eutychius, speaking in the language of his age, calls Patriarch,) and that by imposition of hands and benediction, or prayer, without any other consecration: which custom continued several ages, until at last the neighboring Bishops usurped the power of consecration, and left the

Presbyters neither the choice nor the creation of their Bishop.

“Here we have also an instance of Presbyters making Presbyters; for Euty chius tells us, that the same Presbyters that made their Bishop, chose and ordained another person Presbyter in his room; and so constituted both Presbyters and Bishops for several ages together.

“The Bishop of Worcester tells us, out of Johannes Cassianus, that about the year 390, one Abbot Daniel, inferior to none in the desert Scetis, was made a Deacon ‘by PAPHNUTIUS, a Presbyter of the same retreat; for so greatly was he charmed with the abbot’s virtues, that he was eager to associate with himself in the honor of the Priesthood also, one whom he knew to be his own equal in the excellence of his life. Unable, therefore, to bear the thought that he should remain any longer in the inferior order of the ministry, and anxious to provide for himself a most worthy successor, he promoted Daniel during his own lifetime, to the honor of the Presbyterial office.

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“Here is a Presbyter ordained by a Presbyter, which we nowhere read was pronounced null by Theophilus, then Bishop of Alexandria, or any other of that time. Had

it been either irregular or unusual, doubtless it had been censured.

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“The power of ordination and government was in the hands of the captive Presbyters, under the Scythians beyond Ister, for about seventy years, from the year 260, to the year 327; the former being the year of their captivity under Galienus, the latter of the change of the government under Constantine, when Urphilas was created Bishop by Eusebius, and others.

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“Hilary, or whoever was the Author in Q. ex. utroque Test. mixtim, affirms, That in Alexandria, and throughout all Egypt, if a bishop be wanting, a presbyter consecrates. It cannot be said that “consecrate” here signifies the consecration of the eucharist, for this might be done by the Presbyter when the Bishop was present. If it be taken for confirmation, it doth not prejudice our cause; for the Canon limits the power of confirmation as well as ordination to the Bishop, as was also the power of consecrating churches, if any should take the word in that sense.

“We may understand the meaning by a parallel place of Hilary in Ambrose, who thus speaks :

“The writings of the Apostle” (Paul) “do not in all things agree with the ordination which is now in the church: for even Timothy, (1 Tim. 4, 12. 2. Tim. 16. a Presbyter created by himself) he calls ‘Bishop;’ because the Presbyters were originally called Bishops; so that as one left the office, another who was next to him should take his place. Finally, the Presbyters in Egypt do, at this day, consecrate if a Bishop be not present. But because the Presbyters, who followed next in order, began to be found unworthy of holding the first rank; the mode was changed by the care of a council, so that not the order of rotation, but merit, should make a Bishop, when constituted by the judgment of a number of priests; lest an unfit person should seize the office at random, and be a scandal to many.”

“The same Author saith also, in Tim. 3. “After the *Bishop* he subjoins the order of the *Deacon*. For what other reason than this, that a Bishop and Presbyter have the same ordination. For each of them is a priest, but the Bishop is first.”

“Here note,

“1. That the ordination in Hilary’s time did not in all things agree with the writings of the Apostle. That he speaks of the ordina-

tion of Ministers is evident by the following words: "A Presbyter created by himself."

"At first, Presbyters and Bishops were of the same order and office, and had but one ordination. "The ordination of a Bishop and Presbyter is the same," which shows the meaning of "Ordinatio" in the former paragraph. The Bishop, in Hilary's time, which was about the year 380, under Damasus, was but *primus Sacerdos*, (first priest,) "and not of a superior order: Peter is called *πρωτος*, *primus Apostolus*, (first Apostle) Matth. 10, 2. and yet Protestants hold all the Apostles to be equal.

"3. Spalatensis infers from this quotation, that at the beginning, when a Bishop died, there was not so much as an election of him that was to succeed, (much less any new ordination,) but the eldest Presbyter came into the room of the deceased Bishop. See the preface to Blondel's Apology, p. 11, and 31.

"4. There was a change in the way of choosing their Bishop; "that not order," viz. order of rotation, "but merit should make a Bishop."

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"5. After this change the Presbyters chose and made their Bishop; for so Hilarius affirms him to be—"Constituted by the judgment of a number of Priests."

“6. He adds, that in Egypt, “the Presbyters consecrate, if no Bishop be present.” He speaks in the foregoing words of the identity of Bishops and Presbyters, and he brings this as a confirmation of it, that in the absence of the Bishop they might do those things which custom had appropriated to the Bishops. “Consignare,” is some act of prerogative that the Bishops challenged to themselves, which yet in their absence the Presbyters might perform. Whether we understand it of ordination or confirmation, in which they did ‘Chrismate consignare,’ it is not material, for both were reserved to the Bishop by the Canons. Though by comparing this with the scope of Hilary’s discourse, and with the quotation out of the questions under Austin’s name, ‘If a Bishop be wanting, a Presbyter consecrates,’ it should seem evidently meant of ordination; especially when we find “consignare” to be taken for “consecrare” in several authors, Arnob. lib. 3. Cypr. Ep. 2. Tu tantum quem jam Spiritualibus castris cælestis militia signavit.”

To close this article. A Diocese, i. e. a district under the government of a single Bishop, contained in the fourth century, a large number of congregations, and could not possibly be served by the ministrations in word, sacra-

ments, and family inspection, by a single man. Some episcopal sees were of great extent. That of AUGUSTINE, Bishop of Hippo, was no less than forty miles long. Summarily, Bishops, in those days were a sort of ecclesiastical princes, having thousands and ten thousands of ecclesiastical subjects under their jurisdiction. This will not be disputed. But a primitive Bishop and bishopric were quite other matters; the declaration of Mr. BINGHAM to the contrary notwithstanding. We have yet, among what are accounted the genuine epistles of IGNATIUS, a letter to his friend POLYCARP Bishop of *Smyrna*, and a contemporary of the Apostle JOHN. In that letter he gives the following advice to Polycarp, with regard to the exercise of his episcopal functions :

“Let not the widows be neglected. Next to the Lord, do thou exercise care over them. Let nothing be done without thy sanction—Let your assemblies be held frequently. Inquire after all by name. *Do not overlook the men and maid servants.* Yet let them not be puffed up: but let them yield more perfect service to the glory of God, that they may obtain from him a better freedom. Let them not seek to acquire their freedom at the public expense, lest they should be found to be

slaves of lust.” Here Bishop Polycarp is directed to attend, in person, to the church’s widows—to meet with his people *frequently*—to inquire after them all by *name*; even down to the *very slaves*—to see that this notice *from their Bishop* be not abused by them, so as to grow unruly, and to express impatience under their condition, and an improper expectation of being ransomed and set at liberty by the church’s charity.

These were *then* the functions of a Bishop, IGNATIUS being judge. What must have been the size of Polycarp’s diocese to admit of his performing them? How could they be performed in the fourth century by a Bishop of Hippo through a diocese forty miles long in a populous country? Or by a Bishop of Rome towards a cure of more than a million of souls in the city alone? One would think that the episcopal powers and occupations of AUGUSTINE or LIBERIUS could hardly have been *quite* the same with those of POLYCARP.

It appears then, that the form of church government gradually altered, so as to become, in process of time, very different from the apostolic establishment: and even if this be denied, it is beyond all doubt that different *opinions* prevailed in the primitive church concerning her original order. For, not to men-

tion that JEROME could hardly be alone in his views; could hardly have appealed to the knowledge which the Presbyters of his day had of their own rights, though nearly dormant—the very same sentiments were maintained with great acceptance among good people, by AERIUS, a monk and Presbyter of Armenia, in the fourth century; and produced uneasiness throughout the extensive districts of Armenia, Pontus, and Cappadocia.

Yet all this variety of opinion and practice in the matter of church-order, did not produce, and therefore was not thought sufficient to warrant, *separate communions*. For neither did Jerome, Aerius, and their adherents, who openly attacked the episcopacy of their day as destitute of scriptural and apostolic sanction, withdraw, on that account, from the fellowship of the Catholic church, and set up, like the Novatians and Donatists, a church of their own; nor was there, so far as I have been able to ascertain, any such measure taken, nor any rent among Christians occasioned, in virtue of disagreements under that head. However animated their discussions, and strong the conflict of their feelings, neither did the opposers of the then existing order break off communion with its advocates; nor its advocates, who were the practical majority, expel their

opposers. In different places they maintained their different order, and in the same place their different sentiments, without bursting the bands of their common union. On the contrary, it is worthy of special remark, that Jerome himself, who, of all others, most boldly bearded his cotemporary prelates, and proved their official superiority to be *against* the word of God, yet shuddered at the thought of separation, and condemned separatists in terms of unqualified reprobation. On Prov. vi. 16—19. especially on these words, *He that soweth discord among brethren*, he thus comments: The wise man, “enumerates six capital crimes; which, however, in comparison with the ‘sower of discord,’ he puts by as of minor importance: because the rupture of that unity and brotherhood which the grace of the Holy Ghost hath formed, is the most atrocious deed of the whole. For a man may lift up his eyes in pride; may be guilty of lying; may be polluted with murder; may plot mischief against his neighbor; may employ his members in other enormities—a profligate man, I say, may bring these mischiefs upon himself or others, and yet the peace of the church be preserved. But DONATUS, and ARIUS, and their followers, *have done what is*

worse ; for they have cut asunder the harmony of brotherly union by sowing discord.”

The result is, that different views and practices in the article of her government, were not deemed by the primitive church to be inconsistent with her unity—with her one communion ; nor a justifiable cause of interrupting it.

4th. The same thing is to be said of differences in *subordinate points of doctrine*.

By “subordinate doctrines” are meant all those which may be either believed or doubted, without sacrificing any vital principle of the Christian Religion.

To draw the line of distinction between the essentials and non-essentials of our most Holy Faith, is at all times a delicate and difficult task. To draw it with perfect accuracy is what no prudent man will attempt. But that the distinction exists, that it cannot be abolished, and that it is attended with important consequences, no man of sober sense will deny. All the members of the human body belong to its perfection, and have their peculiar uses. Yet a finger or a toe does not hold the same place in the system with an arm or a leg ; nor an arm or leg the same place with the head or the heart. The amputation of a finger *may* occasion death : the amputation of a larger mem-

ber often does it. At the same time this operation does not necessarily involve the death of the patient; and when limited to the extremities, frequently subjects him to inconveniences comparatively small. No one thinks of disputing his *humanity* on account of such a privation. He may lose a limb, and yet be active, useful, honored, happy; much more so than many who escape his misfortune: because he may have more *life* in his remaining members than they have in their whole number. But his head, his heart, the substance of his body, are *essential*. Lop off his arm, and his recovery may be dubious—death *may* ensue. But cut off his head, cleave his heart, divide his body, and the blow is *fatal*—there is an end of the *man*.

Thus also in the system of revelation. All, the very least, of its truths belong to its perfection. Not one of them may voluntarily be renounced; nor any contrary error be knowingly embraced. Because, he who does either, resists the *obligation* to “receive and obey the truth.” Just as he who “keeps the whole law, and yet offends in one point, is guilty of all.” The entire authority of the lawgiver is in every precept. Sin, therefore, which is “transgression of the law,” whatever precept it may happen to infringe, strikes at the *prin-*

ciple of obedience ; and is ready, as occasion shall offer, to assume any and every form of transgression—to violate *all* the precepts of the law in succession, when impelled by adequate inducement. For he—to continue the Apostle's reasoning—he who “kills,” though he may “not commit adultery,” abstains from the latter crime through the influence of other considerations than the sacredness of the law, or the majesty of the lawgiver ; otherwise he would have refrained from “killing ;” seeing that “he who said, *Do not commit adultery*, said also, *Do not kill*.” Consequently, he who breaks one commandment while he keeps another, when both are enjoined by the same authority, shows that he is prepared, on the occurrence of a suitable temptation, to break the other also. And whoever disbelieves this of himself, “deceiveth his own heart ;” for sin is universal opposition to all of God in all of his law : and, therefore, according to the inspired ethics, the transgression of one precept is accounted simply “a transgression of the law ;” being an act of rebellion against its *whole obligation* as operating in that precept. It is upon this ground, that living in the commission of any *known* sin, however small it may appear, proves men to be destitute of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because they are under

the power of the *principle of sin*, which is “*enmity against God* ;” and have not been “*reconciled to God by the death of his Son*.” So that to venture upon sin, knowing it to be sin, is a desperate experiment in any one who does not intend to “lose his soul.”

In like manner, resistance to God’s truth, to *any* of his truths when perceived to be truth, argues the predominance of the spirit of falsehood—a spirit which, as opportunity should serve, would not hesitate to relinquish *every* truth of his most holy word. Hence no Christian can surrender the least tittle of that truth which he believes to be the testimony of his God ; nor do any act which implies such a surrender. Thousands of the “martyrs of Jesus,” might have saved themselves from the wild beast or the stake, would they only have thrown a handful of incense on a Heathen altar. But they were aware of the construction which their persecutors would put upon this deed ; and, rather than do it, “loved not their lives unto the death.” No motives, then, of conscience, peace, charity, good to be effected, or of what kind soever, can justify, much less require, under any possible circumstances, the sacrifice of a known truth. Such a sacrifice might end in eternal ruin. On the other hand, *mistakes* concerning particular truths, may con-

sist with the general power of truth over the heart. Nay, it is nothing uncommon for men's *notions* to be at war with their *principles*—Their speculative judgment with their practical habits. Many times a sound head is joined to a rotten heart; and a sound heart to a rotten head. Some perish because they do not follow out their professed faith: and others would perish if they did. The not perceiving, and therefore not embracing, the consequences of their error preserves them “from going down to the pit.” And as there is not a human being perfectly exempt from error, there is not one of all them who “shall see the Lord,” but owes more or less to the same protection. How far erroneous conceptions of divine truth may be compatible with a state of pardon and heavenly adoption, it would be presumptuous in us to define. That is the prerogative of him who, searching the heart, can weigh all its influences, interests, and difficulties. But to try how far we may go before we discern our salvation to be in jeopardy, is the insanity of one who should have his limbs amputated higher and higher in order to try how near the operation might approach his vitals without destroying his life. In judging for *himself*, every one must make sure work by keeping on the safe side, not wilfully rejecting

any truth, or adopting any error. In judging of others, he must go every length which the charity of the gospel dictates; i. e. every length consistent with his own attachment to, and support of, the truth; and which does not rank, among matters of forbearance, a clearly vital doctrine of Christianity. This would be not charity, but treason and murder—Treason to the “AMEN, the faithful and true witness”—murder to the soul of our deluded neighbor. For as there are injuries which infallibly kill the body, so there are errors which infallibly kill the soul. If a man be run through the heart, whether by accident or design, whether by his own or another’s hand, he *dies*. And if a man, from whatever cause, renounce the obviously vital doctrines of the gospel—he is not, cannot be, a Christian—there is no relief for him; no help; no hope—he **DIES THE DEATH**. Those doctrines, therefore, *must* be the basis of all *Christian* communion; and maintaining those doctrines pure and entire, “holding the **HEAD**,” Christ Jesus, as saith his Apostle, his followers may and should have open fellowship with each other, on the ground of their common faith; and ought not to refuse each other on the ground of their inferior differences.

Should it be asked, how shall I distinguish an essential from a subordinate doctrine of the

gospel? The answer has been chiefly anticipated. You are not under the necessity of nice and subtle discriminations; and can certainly distinguish with sufficient accuracy for every practical purpose. You are in no danger of mistaking a man's arm for his finger—his head for his foot; nor of supposing that they are equally important to his life. You cannot imagine, for one moment, that the question, “whether Christ by his death purchased *temporal* benefits or not for all mankind?” is like the question “whether or not he bought his people unto God by his blood, in making a true, proper, meritorious sacrifice for their sin, when ‘through the ETERNAL SPIRIT he offered up himself?’” Nor that the dispute, “whether the covenant of Redemption be different from the covenant of Grace?” or what are so called, be in reality but one and the same covenant viewed under different aspects? is to be classed with the dispute “whether JESUS, *the Lord our righteousness*, is a mere man like ourselves, or the ‘true God,’ and, therefore, ‘eternal life?’”—In deciding on the relative importance of such points there is no room for hesitation. Whatever degree of mistake may be reconciled with union to Christ, and an interest in his salvation, it is not, it cannot be a matter of doubt among those who have tasted his

grace, that blaspheming his divinity—rejecting his propitiatory sacrifice ; and the justification of a sinner by faith *only*, in his mediatorial merits—denying the personality, divinity, renewing and sanctifying virtue of his Holy Spirit, and similar heresies ; invalidate every claim to the character of his disciples. They who disown or explain away such truths as these, pretend what they may, are no more servants of Christ, nor partakers of his benefits, than Jews, Mahometans, or Pagans.

In the language of one whose scriptural artillery has often battered and shaken the “ gates of hell,” “ they neither know him, nor love him, nor believe in him, nor do any wise belong unto him.” With such men there can be neither communion nor compromise. They are to be regarded as enemies of both the cross and the crown of our Lord Jesus Christ as that spiritual *Amalek* with whom he and his are sworn to have war, only war, and war continually, “ from generation to generation.” Not that any whom his love “ constrains,” are to cherish hostile or uncourteous, or untender feeling toward their *persons* ; or to think themselves released, in their case, from the obligations of social kindness. God forbid ! Neither fidelity to the truth, nor intense affection to the children of truth, involves such a consequence.

“He,” to repeat the words of Dr. OWEN, “he who professeth love unto the saints, that peculiar love which is required towards them ; and doth not exercise love in general towards all men : much more if he make the pretence of brotherly love the ground of alienating his affection from the rest of mankind, can have no assurance that the love he so professeth is sincere, incorrupt, genuine, and without dissimulation.” Even the most determined enemies of the truth are not to be debarred from this Christian philanthropy. While we hate, oppose, and would utterly destroy their “abominations,” we would do good to themselves, as we have opportunity, both for this life, and for that which is to come. Our “hearts desire and prayer for them is,” and ought to be, “that they may be saved”—that JESUS of Nazareth, the “Prince and Saviour” whom, not knowing, they “persecute,” would appear unto them in the visions of his word—would “open their blind eyes that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in *his* person and work “may shine into their hearts ;” so that obtaining mercy, like the illustrious convert of Tarsus, because they act “ignorantly and in unbelief ;” they may, like him, learn to extol the “exceeding abundant grace of our Lord Jesus ;” and, like him too, “preach,” or

promote "the faith" which they are laboring to "destroy." And the church shall "glorify God in them." AMEN!

But while they "remain in their unbelief"—denying in fact, though acknowledging in words, that "JUST and HOLY ONE," there is an immeasurable gulf between them and real Christians. They have no part in our heavenly "David," nor any inheritance in our "son of Jesse." However painful the necessity, it is still necessity which compels us to exclaim, "O my soul, come thou not into their secret! unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united!"

Such was the judgment and practice of the primitive church. The basis of her communion was laid, as we have already seen, in the substantial doctrines of the gospel, as summed up in her creed. This she required to be adopted and professed by all who offered themselves to her fellowship. It contained, then, her TERMS OF COMMUNION. Consequently, agreement in opinions about which Christians might differ without impugning any of these doctrines, made no part of those terms. In other words, she did not consider such differences as violating her unity. And how numerous they were, no one needs be told who has looked into her history.

Having seen what the primitive church did not view as inconsistent with her visible unity, let us now inquire,

By what, in her judgment, it was liable to be broken. This effect might be produced three ways—

By *schisms* within her bosom ;

By the renunciation of *fundamental* truth ;
and

By *withdrawing from her communion*.

1st. Schisms within her bosom, in the *rupture of brotherly harmony*, she always accounted scandalous violations of her unity, even though the bonds of external fellowship were not thereby dissolved. Let the expostulation of CLEMENS ROMANUS with the church of Corinth, be both example and proof. The professing Christians in that city had given early indications of such a disorderly temper, as to call for the authoritative interposition of the Apostle Paul. When the fire of contention has once seized upon a community, and been fostered by *personal antipathies*, its extinction is one of the most rare and difficult of human things. It may subside for a while, and even appear to go out ; yet if any new brand of controversy be thrown among the public passions, the smothered flame will be rekindled, will seek its wonted channels, and break forth and

rage with increased violence. The same individuals, or their descendants, will be regularly arrayed against each other. Let their be only a dispute, and a person of sense acquainted with previous facts, shall be able, almost infallibly to foretell how the parties will be arranged. If two or three conspicuous individuals who formerly acted together, should declare themselves, the die is cast. Their old opponents take the other side *as a matter of course*. Thus social conflicts become hereditary; and revive under varied shapes, long after the original disagreement is buried and forgotten. Should they, however, be diverted from this their natural direction, and even be happily terminated, they leave in the social body a predisposition to the same evil disease. This was probably the state of the church of Corinth. It had been split up into parties who attached themselves to particular ministers, and were more passionately devoted, as is usual, to the glory of their respective chiefs, than to those great interests in which they were equally concerned. Paul had quelled their foolish tumults: but he is no sooner gone to his crown of righteousness, than they embark in a new strife. A number of those who had quarrelled with each other about their favorite teachers, now turn round, and make

common cause against the teachers themselves. Such is the consistency of human passions ! Such the stability of popular affection !

We learn the fact from CLEMENS ROMANUS, a contemporary of the Apostles, and perhaps the next to the Apostles in worth and dignity. We also learn from him, the light in which the litigious spirit of the Corinthians was viewed by their fellow Christians. In his first, which is his genuine, epistle to their church, he thus pathetically remonstrates with them on the subject of their feuds :

“ Let us cleave to the innocent and the just : for these are the elect of God. Why are there strifes, and angry tempers, and dissensions, and schisms, and fightings, among you ? Have we not one God, and one Christ, and one Spirit poured out upon us ; and one calling in Christ ? Why do we not rend asunder the members of Christ, and factiously strive against our own body, and proceed to such a height of madness as to forget that we are members one of another ? Remember the words of our Lord Jesus : For he said, *Wo to that man ! It had been better for him not to have been born than to lay a stumbling-block before one of my elect : it had been better for him to be bound to a mill-stone, and be plunged into the sea, than to stumble one of my little ones.*

“Your schism has perverted many; has thrown many into despondence; many into wavering; all of us into sorrow—and your factions continue!”

Again: “Let him who has love in Christ, keep the commandments of Christ. The bond of the love of God, who can set forth? the magnificence of his beauty who is sufficient to express as he ought? The height to which love conducts is beyond all utterance. Love permits no *schism*; love cherishes no *factions*: love does everything in *harmony*; by love all the elect of God are perfected—without love, nothing is acceptable to God.”

The dissensions against which Clemens, after the example of Paul, so divinely pleads, were *within* the church. With all their strifes and seditions among themselves, there was one bond which they did not venture to break—the bond of their common Christianity. This still preserved their public union with each other, and with the church of God. Yet observe the topics which Clemens urges for the restoration of concord. They are three:

(1.) All schisms; all dividing of Christian from Christian—all things which prevent their free, full, affectionate, evangelical intercourse, are at war with their relations as members of of the *one* body of Christ.

(2.) They are incompatible with the reigning power of Christian love.

(3.) They hinder the progress of the gospel; they shake the faith of some; produce apostacy in others; grieve the hearts and weaken the hands of unwavering believers, and expose their authors and abettors to the severest comminations of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If the many and woful contentions now in the church of Christ, affect not her children in the same manner, their indifference arises, and can arise, from no other cause than their having "left their first love."

Let this suffice for the first point.

2d. The primitive church considered the *renunciation of fundamental truth* as inconsistent with her unity.

This flowed, and must forever flow, as a necessary consequence from the very principle of her being, viz., her FAITH. She is *built upon the foundation of the APOSTLES and PROPHETS, JESUS CHRIST, himself being the chief corner-stone*; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.

The apostles and prophets, i. e. their inspired doctrines, contain God's TESTIMONY concerning that *eternal life which he hath GIVEN to*

us in his SON ; which divine TESTIMONY is addressed to, and embraced by, the FAITH of his church. And as the sole foundation of faith, in every possible form and degree, is testimony ; so, whatever rests upon testimony, must have faith as its essential principle. Therefore, the church of God founded upon pure revelation, i. e. upon his own testimony in his written word, exists by faith, and by faith alone. As this is not the time to “stop the mouths” of those “vain talkers,” who charge the doctrine which so highly exalts the *faith* of the church, with depressing, in the same proportion, her love and practice of moral virtue ; they shall be dismissed with a single remark—should a man, on the search for “true holiness,” go in quest of it among the *unbelievers*, the world itself would account him vastly simple !

To return. Try the common sense of mankind on this point. Ask them what they would think of an *unbelieving church of God* ? The idea is shocking. Our understandings revolt from its absurdity ; our hearts from its impiety. No ingenuity has ever been able to justify, or even to palliate, before the bar of plain dealing, subscription to creeds which the subscriber does not sincerely believe, upon the pretence of their being “articles of peace ;”

or of their admitting a construction which is not their obvious, unlabored, natural meaning. This is jugglery all over. The two-faced oracle of DELPHOS in the sanctuary of God. It belongs to those deep dissimulations,

“That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.”

The agreement thus apparently effected between belief and unbelief; between faith and no faith—the oil and water in Christian doctrine was well defined by one who “smacked” but little of orthodoxy, to be, “not the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; but the union of knaves in the bond of hypocrisy.”

In such arts the early church was no adept. That same SPIRIT OF GOD who taught her the most extended charity towards those who, with all their differences, were one in “the *faith* of our Lord Jesus Christ,” taught her also to contend *earnestly* for that faith; and not to receive into her bosom, and nurture as her children, any by whom it should be corrupted. “*If there come any unto you,*” says John, “*and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that bid-deth him ‘God speed,’ is partaker of his evil deeds.*” To that conspiracy against truth,

which, under the guise of charity, welcomes or endures all sorts of doctrines, and those the most contradictory, even concerning the person and work of "God our Saviour," both the beloved disciple and the church of his master, were utter strangers. To deny any capital article of her faith, was, in her view, to mar her symmetry, to destroy her unity, to tear up her very foundations. Hence her public creeds, which she required to be embraced by every candidate for baptism—hence her stress upon her ONE faith throughout the whole world—and her abhorrence of heresy and heretics. Hence the work of IRENÆUS against the doctrinal heresies which had troubled her peace until his day. IRENÆUS was for some time a contemporary of POLYCARP, having seen him, as he says himself, in the early part of his life. This zealous vindicator of the one faith of the church, tells us upon POLYCARP's authority, as the story was related by those who had it from POLYCARP's own lips, that the Apostle JOHN, having gone into a bath at Ephesus, and observing CERINTHUS, sprang out immediately, exclaiming, "*Let us fly, lest the bath should fall—CERINTHUS, the enemy of the truth, is there!*" And POLYCARP himself having fallen in with MARCION, who begged to be recognized by him as a brother, "*I recognize*

thee," cried Polycarp, "*as the first born of Satan!*" "So religiously," adds IRENÆUS, "did the Apostles and their disciples shun all intercourse, even in conversation, with any of those who adulterated the truth." These traits of primitive character bear as little resemblance to the "charity" of the present age, as that charity bears to real love to men or loyalty to God. CYPRIAN is very explicit. "The enemy," says he, "exposed and prostrated by the coming of Christ—contrived a new fraud that he might deceive the thoughtless under the very sanction of the Christian name. He invented heresies and schisms, that he might subvert the faith, corrupt the truth, and rend unity." One of the ways, then, of rending the unity of the church, was the subversion of her *faith*; which is the effect of fundamenal error, and the design of that father of lies from whom it proceeds.

It is superfluous to multiply quotations. The very term HERESY, which simply signifies DIVISION, was early appropriated to *false doctrine*, for this very reason, that the bond of the church's unity is *faith in the TRUTH*; which bond nothing more effectually unites than the propagation of *doctrinal FALSEHOOD*.

3d. The unity of the primitive church was broken by *withdrawing from her communion*; or

which was, in her eyes, the same thing, the setting up of *separate and restricted communions*.

If custom, which reconciles men to both absurdity and sin, had not familiarized the spectacle of evangelical churches alienated from, and often arrayed against, each other—my soul shudders—in *the NAME OF THE LORD JESUS!!* it would be inconceivable how the idea of **ONE catholic CHURCH** can be discovered from that of **ONE catholic COMMUNION**. That union should not be a basis for communion—that “particular churches, which are members of the catholic church,” as parts of one whole, should, in their church capacity, have no fellowship with each other, though they constitute but one body—nay, that such fellowship should be unwholesome, unholy, unlawful; although as parts of one whole, they have the very same means of life, health, vigor—is so desperate an assault upon the sense of consistency—such a Leviathan of a paradox, that the faculties of poor human nature sink beneath it.

None of the ancients blundered in this style. Orthodox or heterodox, they agreed in one point, viz. that *different communions exclude the idea of unity*. Hence, on the one hand, the *Novatians, Luciferians, Donatists*, who set up restrictive communions, acted upon the avowed principle that the Catholic church, from which

they withdrew, had ceased to be the church of Christ. And, on the other hand, they who condemned the separatists, held, that by the very fact of their separate communion, they threw themselves out of the church of God, and ceased to be a part of her. The ground, then, upon which they both stood, is this, that two churches refusing communion with each other, do thereby renounce their relation to each other as parts of a common whole : and that it is idle to pretend that the public unity of the church can be made to consist with such divisions.

To give at full length the proofs of what is here advanced, would be to transcribe a large portion of the works of some of the early fathers. It is assumed, as incontrovertible, by both CYPRIAN and AUGUSTINE, in their respective controversies with the *Novatians and Donatists* ; and frequently asserted in the most formal and unqualified manner. A specimen shall suffice.

After showing from the scriptures the visible unity of the church, CYPRIAN thus demands :

“ Does he who maintains not this unity, imagine that he possesses the faith ? Does he who sets himself *against* the church, cherish a confidence of his being *in* the church ? ” Again : “ Whoever is disjoined from the

church, is joined to an adulteress ; is separated from the promises made to the church. Nor can that man attain to the rewards of Christ, who leaves the church of Christ. He is an alien, he is profane, he is an enemy.” Once more. “Let no one, brethren, cause you to err from the ways of the Lord. Let no one tear you, Christians, from the gospel of Christ. Let no one remove from the church, the church’s sons. Let them, who are willing to perish, perish by themselves. Let them who have departed from the church, remain without the church, alone.”

These things are spoken of the *Novatians*, who were not accused of unsound doctrine ; who carried their ecclesiastical discipline to an excessive rigor ; and who, from displeasure at what they accounted the laxness of the church, in dealing with the “lapsed,” withdrew from her fellowship, and formed a church and communion of their own. It was the fact of this separation, though under the plea of cultivating and preserving a higher degree of purity, which constituted their offence, and drew upon them the general indignation of the church of God.

In a similar way AUGUSTINE speaks of the *Donatists* and their schism.

“They who imagine that their own denomi-

nation is now clean wheat, have flown away from the *mixture* of chaff and wheat, as if they were pure chaff: and they who think that they no longer feed with the goats under one shepherd, are severed, by the stratagems of wolves, from the Lord's flock: and they who suppose that they are not gathered together with the bad fish, are not only bad fish themselves, but have broken the nets of unity."

JEROME also, on Eph. 4, 3. observes "This place bears particularly hard upon the heretics, who break the *bond of peace*, yet think that they maintain the '*unity of the Spirit*:' whereas the unity of the Spirit is preserved by the bond of peace. For when, instead of concord in our professions, we cry out, *I am of Paul—I of Apollos—I of Cephas*, we divide the unity of the Spirit, and rend it into shreds." That the venerable father meant his censure should attach, with peculiar force, to those who had receded from the Catholic fellowship of the church, and set up for themselves, is clear, not only from the nature of his argument, but also from his sentiments formerly quoted.

Innumerable testimonies of the same sort are at hand, but shall not be brought forward: as the preceding fully establish, we believe, the position advanced in the beginning of this section, viz. that the primitive church account-

ed her unity to be violated, by *internal schisms*—by the *renunciation of fundamental truth*—and by *separate communions*.

There remains yet a

Third Inquiry. *By what means was the visible unity of the primitive church preserved and proclaimed?*

The answer to this question flows so naturally from the foregoing discussion, that it might, perhaps, be left to the reader's own inference. But, to prevent uncertainty or mistakes, it shall be given distinctly.

Her unity, then, was preserved and evinced, chiefly,

1st. By an inflexible adherence to the great truths of the gospel, as summed up in her creed. Here was her **ONE** faith, with which she permitted no tampering. This faith her members, all the world over, were expected and required, not merely to abstain from denying, which is at best a negative assurance, but also to embrace and profess. On this point enough has been said already.

2d. By her members' conformity to the customs and usages of any particular church which they might happen to visit.

No local or national peculiarities were allowed to usurp the rank of terms of communion. No small fastidiousness about matters

which affected not the *substance* of the Christian profession, to disturb the Christian peace. Whoever, from ignorance, vanity, moroseness, or any other of those deceits which clothe a factious temper in the habiliments of holy zeal, and impute to religious prudery the virtues of a tender conscience, made a noise about things indifferent, and chose to be in dudgeon because he could not fashion the world after his own image, was considered as “ministering questions, rather than godly edifying;” as being more a scandal than an ornament to the gospel. This point also has been sufficiently handled above.

3d. By respecting and supporting *discipline* wheresoever and by whomsoever, within her pale, inflicted.

A person censured by one church was, of course excluded from every other. No petitions, penitence, complaint, or other expedient, could avail for his admission without reconciliation to the church by which he had been censured. It was inconceivable to these Christian “elders,” how a sentence of one court of Christ’s kingdom should not be held valid and sacred by every other. To own a church as a member of the church catholic, and yet to disregard, or revise her acts of discipline, is an inconsistency into which they

were cautious of falling. It was, in their eyes, equivalent to rejecting her ministry and ordinances. So that whatever subordinate differences might subsist between them, while they acknowledged each other as true churches, they never thought of interfering with each other's judicial acts ; or of releasing from censure each other's offenders. Thus they reciprocated confidence, and imparted mutual strength, declared their social union, and drew, by their combined efforts, a line of defence round the "city of God." So thoroughly was this maxim understood, and so generally applied, that "when Pope ZOSIMUS and CELESTINE took upon them to receive appellants from the African churches, and absolve those whom they had condemned, St. AUSTIN and all the African churches sharply remonstrated against this as an irregular practice, violating the laws of unity, and the settled rules of ecclesiastical commerce, which required, *That no delinquent, excommunicated in one church, should be absolved in another, without giving satisfaction to his own church that censured him.*"

4th. By holding ministerial and Christian communion with all true churches, as opportunity offered. That is to say, every church received into communion as fully as her own immediate members, ministers and private

Christians, from any and every other church under the whole heaven, upon evidence of their good standing: which evidence, when they were not otherwise sufficiently known, was furnished by letters of recommendation, or what we call testimonials or certificates, from their respective churches. And, on the other hand, ministers and private Christians deemed it their duty, and made it their practice, to join in communion with whatever church they might happen to visit in any part of the world.

A strong example of this communion was quoted before, in the case of **POLYCARP** of *Smyrna*, and **ANICETUS** of *Rome*; and that at a time when there existed warm disputes between the Asiatic and European churches. The strain of the whole narrative in **EUSEBIUS**, shows that this was not an exception to, but an instance of, the ascertained and undisputed rule of church-fellowship. As, indeed, a very simple consideration fully proves. For the very intention of **POLYCARP**'s journey to Rome was, *to prevent the communion of the Catholic church being broken by subordinate differences*: and he succeeded; so that the peace of the whole church was preserved. In token whereof, he not only communicated with the church of Rome, but at the request of **ANICETUS**, dispens-

ed the Lord's supper : one of the highest acts of ministerial communion.

The whole correspondence between the *African* and *Roman* churches, as contained in the letters to and from CYPRIAN, is conducted upon the same principle. Of this any one will be satisfied, who shall take the trouble to peruse them. He will perceive, that the proof of this assertion lies rather in their general cast and spirit, and in their *obviously supposing the fact*, than in particular expressions. A proof of all others the most decisive with those who know how to estimate proof. A particular witness may err or deceive : but public transactions between social bodies, such as organized churches, bearing upon their face the most intimate and confidential co-operation with regard to their most sacred internal concerns, and those as forming one common interest, preclude mistake and doubts, as to the fact of their social communion. Such is the character of the transactions mentioned in the correspondence of CYPRIAN. It cannot, therefore, be produced at length here, because that would require the transcription of a volume. But for the sake of those to whom a *case* is more satisfactory than a *principle*, I subjoin an extract from CYPRIAN's thirty-second epistle,

written to the Presbyters and Deacons of *Carthage* during his exile.

Speaking of the letters which he had addressed to the clergy at Rome, and of their answers he says, "Be as careful as possible, that what both I and they have written, be made known to the brethren. And, moreover, if there should be present with you, or should happen to arrive, any *foreign Bishops, my colleagues, or Presbyters, or Deacons*, let them hear the whole. And should they wish copies of these letters to carry back to their connexions, aid them in the transcription: although I have charged our brother SATURUS, the Reader, to let all who may desire it have an opportunity of transcribing them, that somehow or other adjusting, in the interim, the churches, one harmonious plan may be pursued by all."

Two things appear to be settled by this letter :

(1.) CYPRIAN would hardly dignify with the appellation of his "*colleagues*," or invite to co-operation with himself in the affairs of his *own church*, ministers with whom he did not, or would not, *hold communion*.

(2.) As these ministers, to whom his correspondence with the Roman ministry was to be imparted, belonged neither to the African nor

Roman church, but were “foreigners,” (*peregrinis*) it is clear, that the most intimate ministerial communication was maintained with churches of different nations and distant places.

Observations like those upon CYPRIAN’S general correspondence, are applicable to the letters of ATHANASIUS, written at various times to various individuals, orders, and churches. But, for brevity’s sake here also, one example shall suffice :

“There frequently comes to the city, a man well qualified to preach in Greek. Whoever study the gratification of their ears, hasten to church, not to get healing to their souls, but merely to catch the beauty of the composition. The eloquent speaker goes away ; these tares also go from the church, for they have nothing of the wheat, nothing of faith. But the believer, however elegantly the preacher speaks, makes it his business to attend to what is said, whether it be in the *Syrian, Roman*, or any *other* tongue. For he regards the *matter*, not the *words*.” *Alexandria*, the city to which ATHANASIUS alludes, was the metropolis of what is known in history as the *Egyptian Diocese*.

From this extract, it is clear, that the churches of Egypt, Syria, Italy, Greece, and

indeed of the whole world, held Christian and ministerial communion with each other, as a *matter of course*, when opportunities occurred.

But not to multiply authorities which might be tedious to the reader, and to put this point at once beyond all question, there is, in the compilation called the *Apostolical constitutions*, a chapter with the following title :

“ *Concerning letters of recommendation brought by STRANGERS, whether of the LAITY, CLERGY, or BISHOPS ; and that there should be no distinction,*” viz. between them and the members, whether lay or clerical, of the church to which they come.

The chapter then proceeds :

“ If there come from a church abroad brethren or sisters with credentials, let the deacon make the proper inquiry respecting them, whether they profess the faith, belong to the church, and be not contaminated with heresy. And again, if a woman, whether she be married or a widow. And thus having ascertained that they are sound in the faith, and of one accord with the church in the things of the Lord, let him conduct every one to his proper place. Should a presbyter come from abroad, let him be *received into official communion* by the presbyters. If a deacon, by the deacon. If a bishop, let him take his seat with the

bishop, being accounted by him as worthy of equal honor. And thou shalt request him, O bishop, to *address the people in the word of doctrine*. For exhortation and admonition by *strangers is acceptable*, and in *the highest degree useful*. For no prophet, saith Christ, is accepted in his own country. Thou shalt also employ him to *offer the eucharist* : And should he, out of respect to thee, with a view, like a wise man, to maintain thy honor, decline this service, thou shalt *insist* that he at least *bless the people*.”

Although these “Constitutions” are not of apostolic authority, as the erratic and fanciful WHISTON imagined, preferring them even above the writings of a *single* Apostle ; but the work of some pretender two centuries later, as the learned for most part agree ; yet they clearly show what was the state of the church respecting communion at the time they were composed ; and what was the current opinion concerning her uniform practice. Little stress, indeed, is to be laid on that opinion, simply as such ; for it was undeniably erroneous in some other things of moment. But as it coincides with the scriptural doctrine of the unity of the church, as well as with facts established by different witnesses, it is entitled to more than ordinary credit in the present argument. The

mere fact of this catholic communion, both Christian and ministerial, being so sedulously kept up in the third or fourth century, furnishes an almost demonstrative proof that it was so from the beginning. Human vanity and policy breed discord, not peace ; put asunder what God has joined ; never join what the Devil has put asunder. So that the *one* communion of the church, being directly contrary to the corruption of man and the interest of hell, could never have existed without the ordinance and operation of God.

It has now been proved, we hope, to the conviction of the reader, that the communion for which these pages plead, viz. the free and full interchange of fellowship in all evangelical ordinances, between believers of every name, on the broad basis of their agreement in the substantial doctrines of the cross, is precisely that communion which was maintained in the primitive church, beginning with the days and the example of the Apostles themselves. The local and party exceptions to this general position are furnished by the *Novatians*, *Donatists* and *Luciferians*, who have already been noticed. The two former brought the principle of catholic communion to a rigorous test : and the discussions respecting their schisms, terminated, as we have seen, in its

triumph as a principle of the most sacred obligation. The sect of *Luciferians*, so named from *Lucifer*, bishop of *Cagliari*, in *Sardinia*, was too feeble and ephemeral to attract regard on the general question. The same remark applies to those very partial suspensions of communion which arose most frequently from *personal* considerations; and were rather effusions of passion and spleen, than expressions of opinion deliberately adopted, or authoritative precedents likely to be followed. They were just sufficient to show the strength of the ties which they endeavored to break; and to establish the doctrine which they might be quoted to discredit. That doctrine, which the present argument aims to revive and recommend; and which the author is confident no *material* facts can be found to invalidate.

Here, then, we take leave of the *primitive* church. Even in the fourth century many grievous abuses had sprung up, grown rank, and brought forth their poisonous fruit, especially in her worship and government. The policy of **CONSTANTINE** which secularized her form; his profusion, which corrupted her virtue; and the meretricious attire which banished her modesty, prepared her for rapid infidelities to her **LORD**, and for her final prostitution to the **MAN OF SIN**. From the fifth cen-

ture may be dated that career of shame which, particularly in the Western empire, she ran, with wild incontinence, through the night of the “dark ages;” until she was branded from above as the “**MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.**”

To carry down the induction of facts during these opprobrious centuries, would be an idle expenditure of time and toil, as its results would be of no value in the eyes of those for whom these pages are penned. Omitting them altogether, we resume our thread at that eventful crisis when the faithful remnant heard and obeyed the mandate of their God. “*Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*”

The reader perceives at once, that we allude to the **REFORMATION** from **POPERY**.

All who are conversant with the history of that stupendous revolution, know that it turned mainly on two points, viz. the *faith* and *worship* of the church. The one was to be reclaimed from its manifold perversions; and the other to be disencumbered of a monstrous ritual. By the first, the light of life in the gospel was almost extinguished; and by the second, men were bowed down under a load of superstitions which **FRAUD** had been accu-

mulating for ages upon the back of **IGNORANCE**. Both these evils were to be remedied. Truth was to be restored to her purity, and worship to her simplicity. The minds of men were to be liberated from their bondage, and the word of God to reassume its authority. Tradition was to fall under the sword of the commandment; and, "Thus saith the Lord," to dissipate the figments of the elders. The mantle of the Apostles fell upon the Reformers; while the "Spirit of judgment and of burning," both enlightened their path, and devoured the thorns and briars which impeded their march.

The interests which they rose to vindicate; the severity of the conflict which they had to sustain; and the long train of consequences which were to flow from their measures, called forth that mighty talent, magnanimous feeling, and elevated principle, which have nothing to throw away upon trifles; but endless treasures of intellect and toil, of suffering and blood, to lavish in the cause of **JESUS CHRIST**.

The **PROTESTANT CHURCHES**, therefore, from the Reformation downwards, shall furnish our Third class of facts.

On the several points enumerated above, viz. defective moral discipline—different rites

of worship—different views of external order—and different opinions in subordinate doctrines, there was a marked coincidence between the views of the Reformers and of the primitive Christians; both agreeing that they are not sufficient grounds of disunion among Christians, nor of their excluding each other from the most tender and ample fellowship in the things of God. In the case of the Reformers, this is the more worthy of notice, as a proof of their having imbibed the pure spirit of the gospel; seeing they did not, like the first heralds of the cross, issue from one nation, and one spot, with simultaneous commissions, and after having been educated together for several years by the Master himself: but were of different countries, languages, habits, prejudices; many of them absolute strangers to each other, yet all drawing their doctrines out of the one well of salvation—the holy scripture. Their concord, therefore, in matters about which they had no guide but the word of God, can hardly be attributed to another cause than his “sending forth his light and his truth.” And they did declare themselves, every abundantly, both in word and deed, upon the subject now before us.

Their adversaries, the Papists, from whose communion they had separated, denied their

whole claim to the character of Christian churches. To repel such a charge, it was necessary to determine from the word of God what constitutes the true church ; to give its distinctive marks ; and to show that they belonged to it themselves. In doing this, they fixed upon such characteristics as are common, even at the present hour, to all the churches of Reformed Christendom, which have not lost the faith of the Trinity and the atonement. These characteristics are generally summed up, in their confessions, under two heads—

1st. The pure doctrine of the gospel.

2d. The right administration of the sacraments.

“The Church,” says the Augustan confession, drawn up by MELANCTHON, in 1530, revised by LUTHER and other divines, and published as the authentic expression of the Lutheran faith, “The church, properly so called, has her signs, viz. the pure and sound doctrine of the gospel, and the right use of the sacraments ; and for the *true unity* of the Church, *it is sufficient to agree in the doctrine of the gospel and the right use of the sacraments.*” That such was the sense of the Protestant world, is evident from the testimonies referred to in the margin, which are not transcribed, as it would only be a series of tautologies, the

very same thing being asserted nearly in the same words. What is meant by the "pure gospel," and the due administration of the sacraments, must be ascertained from the confessions themselves. That they vary in certain particulars; some being more full, and others more brief; some more, and others less precise; some having what others want; and some even maintaining, in secondary matters, what has not the sanction of the rest, is unquestionable. It would have been a wonder equal to the fable of the seventy-two translators of the Old Testament into Greek, had no such diversity happened. But nothing can be more clear or consoling than their harmony in all the leading doctrines of the gospel, which are known at this day as **THE DOCTRINES OF THE REFORMATION**. Around these Christians rallied with one heart and one soul. These were the basis of their union and communion. Nor is there such a thing as a *sectarian* note of the church to be found either among their public instruments of profession, or in any protestant writer of eminence, with whom the author is acquainted, whether of that or of a subsequent age.

Now that they judged their concord in the capital articles of faith to be sufficient for every purpose of Christian unity and fellowship, is

plain from their obvious intention, which was, to justify themselves and their principles from the calumnies of their adversaries. The great crime with which they were charged was their renouncing **THE** church. They were stigmatised as schismatics, heretics, fanatics, apostates, profligates. They replied, that their departure was a matter not of choice, but of necessity ; that they had no alternative but to part with popery or with piety ; to put their souls in jeopardy, or to withdraw from Rome : and that instead of apostatising from **JESUS CHRIST**, they were only returning to the ancient faith which Rome had forsaken. They accordingly laid open her abominations to the world ; and with their Bible in the one hand, and their confession in the other, they proclaimed the truth which is “according to godliness.” Certainly, if it was to enjoy this truth, and the worship connected with it, that they broke communion with Rome, their very act declares it to be the ground of communion with each other ; for if it were not so, and so viewed, they would have been self convicted of having lost the church of God in their zeal to reform her, inasmuch as they would not have retained enough to *erect a church-communion*. But if they were not guilty of such folly ; if they committed no such ridiculous

suicide, as every Protestant will insist; then it follows that the doctrines of their confessions being substantially the same, and excluding, often avowedly, their other differences as not essential, were, in their own eyes, the true and broad foundation of church-communion.

This conclusion grows out of the very structure of their confessions; but they have fortified it by declarations which are of the nature, and almost in the form of a *protest* against disunion, on account of those peculiar features which may distinguish the churches of one country or name from those of another, without infringing upon their common faith. All such peculiarities, whether in government, worship, discipline, manners, or modifications of doctrine, they held to be subjects of brotherly forbearance; and no just cause of dissension, far less of sectarian communion. On the contrary, like the primitive Christians, they maintained, that the one church of God, scattered over the whole earth, ought to have but *one* communion. So that whoever is in communion with one part of the Catholic church, is, by this very fact, in communion with every other part, and is so to be acknowledged, received, and cherished.

Lest I should be thought to exaggerate, they shall speak for themselves.

The AUGSBURGH confession, (A. D. 1530,) “condemns the *Donatists* and their like.” Now the *Donatists*, as was shown above, broke off from the Catholic church on pretence of her having bad men in her communion, and even in her ministry. This, say the Lutheran Protestants, was not a sufficient cause; they of course condemn all those churches who refuse communion with others on account of defective moral discipline.

The BELGIC confession, i. e. of Calvinist Protestants in the United Provinces, (1561,) thus lays down their faith respecting the church:

“We believe and confess one catholic or universal church; which is the true congregation or assembly of all faithful Christians who expect their whole salvation from Christ Jesus alone; as they are washed in his blood, and sanctified and sealed by his Spirit. This holy church is limited to no particular place or person, but is spread over the whole earth; yet, through the power of faith, is joined and united, all of it, by affection and will, in one and the same spirit.

“We believe, that since this sacred assembly and congregation consists of those who shall be saved, and there is no salvation out of

it, no person, of whatever rank or dignity, may withdraw himself therefrom, so as to *live separately contented with his own custom only*. But on the contrary, that all are bound to join themselves to this assembly, and *carefully preserve the unity of the church*, and freely to submit themselves to her doctrine and discipline, bowing their neck to the yoke of Christ; and as members in common of the same body, to lay themselves out for the edification of their brethren, as God has bestowed his gifts upon them respectively. Moreover, that these things may be the better observed, it is the duty of all believers to disjoin themselves from those who are without the church, and to *join themselves to this assembly and congregation of the faithful, wherever God has formed it*. Whoever, therefore, shall forsake that true church, or *shall refuse to connect themselves with it*," (in whatever part of the world it be,) "*do openly resist the commandment of God*."

"We believe that the utmost diligence and prudence are to be used in determining, according to the word of God, which is that true church, since all the sects upon earth lay claim to the same title. We do not now speak of hypocrites who are mingled with good men in the church, although they do not properly belong to her, but of distinguishing

the body and congregation of the true church from all other sects which falsely boast of being members thereof.

“By the following marks, therefore, shall the true church be distinguished from the false. If there flourish there the *pure preaching of the gospel, and the legitimate administration of the sacraments according to the command of Christ*. If, moreover, *right discipline be applied for the coercion of vice*; if, in fine, to sum up all in one word, *she reduce every thing to the rule of God’s word, reject all things contrary thereunto, and acknowledge Christ to be her only head*. By these marks, we say, may be known the true church, from which it is not lawful for any one to separate himself.”

Some of these expressions are very strong: and to one not acquainted with the circumstances under which they were used, may look as if they required *spotless perfection* in a true church; or absolute agreement in all views of scriptural institutions. But the reader must not permit himself to be carried away by such a mistake; nothing could be further from the intention of this “good confession.” Its object is to show the Protestant church to be a true church in opposition to the church of Rome; as is manifest from the sequel of this very article, where the false church is described

as “always attributing more to herself, her institutions, and traditions, than to the word of God—as not subjecting herself to the yoke of Christ—as not administering the sacraments according to his prescription; but one while adding to them, and another diminishing from them—as always relying more upon men than upon Christ; and as persecuting those who aim at holy conformity to his law, and who arraign her avarice, idolatry, and other vices.”

Such phrases, therefore, as “the *pure* preaching of the gospel”—“the administration of the sacraments *according to the command of Christ*”—“the *right* use of discipline”—“the reducing *every thing to the rule of God’s word*”—“the rejection of all things contrary thereto,” must be interpreted not so much of the *actual attainment of scriptural perfection* by any churches whatever, as their avowed *standard*; the *test* to which they submit their pretensions; and of their *substantial* character, whatever, in other respects, might be their failings or differences. That this is the true meaning, the following considerations make evident.

(1.) The Belgic churches themselves had not then, and have not since, arrived at such purity as their own confession, according to certain expressions separately taken, seems to

require. And they surely did not intend to say that they had not themselves true churches, and were unworthy of communion with others.

(2.) The churches adopting this confession *approved* the confession of the Swiss churches, commonly called the *Helvetic* confession, which, as we shall presently see, disclaims the idea of withdrawing from communion with the churches of Germany, France, England, and other Christian nations. Their own act, therefore, proclaims their communion with these foreign churches, and no construction may be put upon their words which shall contradict their own practical commentary.

(3.) This same Belgic confession was unanimously approved by the continental divines at the synod of Dordt, A.D. 1619; as “containing no doctrine adverse to the declarations of holy scripture; but, on the contrary, as agreeing with the truth, and with the confessions of the other reformed churches.” It cannot, then, be fairly understood in a sense hostile to those confessions; if we allow the delegates from almost all Protestant Christendom to have known any thing of the faith of their respective churches: and among these churches there was then, as there is now, great diversity in many things.

The Belgic confession, therefore, waving all

minor differences between Christians, and bent on supporting the great things of their common faith, contends for the church's unity on this consecrated ground ; and insists that it is the duty of every one who loves the LORD JESUS, to hold communion with her through the medium of any one of her branches to which he may have access in any part of the world. If there be but a *true* church, that is enough to *justify* his participation of her ordinances ; and if she be the *only* true church there, to render such participation his *bounden duty*. Thus the Belgic confession, and, of course, all who approved it.

As for rites, ceremonies, modifications of external order, &c., which form the chief differences among churches who hold the main doctrines of faith, those same Christian heroes, of whom thousands and ten thousands were enrolled in "the noble army of martyrs," speak in the following manner :

AUGUSTAN confession. "If doctrine and faith be pure, no one, on account of dissimilitude in human traditions, is to be deemed a heretic, or a deserter of the Catholic church. For the unity of the Catholic church consists in the *harmony of doctrine and faith, not in human traditions, whereof there has always been*

in the churches throughout the whole world a great diversity."

The BOHÆMIC confession. "Although the external face and form of our churches be now peculiar, yet this is done for no other reason than greater convenience in teaching the word, administering the sacraments, and terminating disputes among brethren who may consult us. As also for the exercise of discipline, by excommunicating those whose conduct merits correction, and who, though infamous for their open enormities, refuse to repent; and by re-admitting them, upon repentance, to the fellowship of the church, and the sacrament of the Eucharist. We are not, therefore, separated from the Catholic church, seeing we enjoy all those things which properly appertain to her.

"As to the differences which may obtain among the churches in external rites or ceremonies, we think it of no importance; for these greatly vary among Christians, according to variety of place and nation. Ceremonies change; but faith, Christ, the word, change not. Therefore, a variety of ceremonies, if they be not repugnant to the word of God, neither does harm to Christianity, nor separates from the church. For true religion or Christian piety does not consist in external rites or

ceremonies, but in spiritual benefits: in righteousness, faith, joy, peace, and true worship, there being first laid (as saith Paul) the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom, whatever building be compacted, it groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." See also the whole eighth article in the confession itself, "*concerning the holy Catholic church.*"

The SAXON confession. "In the mean time there have been, and are, and will be, in the church of God, men holding the foundation, who have, and have had, and will have, some more, some less light; and sometimes saints too build stubble upon the foundation, since, especially in the wretchedness of the present times, many who have the beginnings of faith have not the privilege of being instructed, and of conferring with those who are more skilful. These, however, are in the number of those whom it is the will of God we should spare (Ezech. 9.) who groan and grieve on account of established error. A judgment, therefore, must and may be formed chiefly from the voice of doctrine, what and where is the true church, which, by the voice of true doctrine, and the legitimate use of the sacraments, is distinguished from all other human societies;

and what the voice of true doctrine is, the very writings of the apostles and prophets, and the *creeds*, sufficiently declare. In these there is no ambiguous doctrine concerning the *foundation*, viz., concerning the articles of faith, the essence and will of God, the redemption of the Son, the law, the promises, the use of the sacraments, the ministry"—

The HELVETIC confession. "We lay so great stress upon communion with the true church of Christ, as to deny that they can live before God, who do not communicate with the true church of God, but separate themselves therefrom." The confession then protests against harsh judgment and practices on account of individual infirmity, or of abuses and corruptions in particular churches; and adds, "It is to be observed, that we diligently teach in what the truth and unity of the church principally consist; that we may not rashly excite and cherish schisms in the church. *It consists not in ceremonies and external rites, but rather in the truth and unity of the Catholic faith. The Catholic faith has not been delivered to us in human laws, but the divine scripture, of which the apostles' creed is a compend.* Whence we read that among the ancients there was great diversity of rites which were entirely free, and by which no

one ever imagined the unity of the church to be destroyed.

In regard to rites and ceremonies, the twenty-seventh article remarks, “That if discordant rites are found in the churches, let no one, therefore, imagine, that the churches are disunited. ‘It would be impossible,’ says SOCRATES, ‘to detail all the rites of the churches in different countries. No religious sects observe the same rites, although they embrace the same doctrine concerning them. For they who are of the same faith disagree with each other about their rites.’ Thus he. And we, at this day, with different rites through our churches in celebrating the Lord’s supper, and in some other things, do, nevertheless, preserve agreement in doctrine and faith; nor is the unity and intercourse of our churches, by that difference, torn asunder. The churches have always used their liberty in such rites, as being indifferent. And we do the same at this day.”

And lest any doubt or difficulty should remain on this subject, the subscribers to the Helvetic confession thus express themselves in their preface :

“Impartial readers will clearly perceive that we have no communion with any sects or heresies, which, for this very end, we

mention and reject in almost every chapter. They will, therefore, infer also, that we do not, *by any nefarious schism, separate and rend ourselves from the holy churches of Christ, in Germany, France, England, and other Christian nations*: but that we thoroughly agree with each and all of them in this confession of Christ's truth, and embrace them in unfeigned love: 'and although there be discovered, in different churches, a certain variety of expression and form of explaining doctrine; as also of rites or ceremonies according to the received usage, convenience, and edification of particular churches, yet they will notice, that these things never furnished, in any period of the church, ground of dissensions and schism. The churches of Christ, as ecclesiastical history shows, have always used their liberty in this matter. For pious antiquity that mutual agreement *in the principal points of faith*, in orthodox understanding, and in brotherly love, was abundantly sufficient.'” The rest of the preface is in the same strain.

Let us briefly sum up the doctrine of these extracts from the confession of the Swiss churches.—They contend,

(1.) For liberty in rites and ceremonies of worship—

(2.) For mutual forbearance in the article of church government—

(3.) For latitude in the forms of doctrinal expression, provided the *substance* of evangelical truth be preserved : so as that diversity in any or all of these things shall not break up the peace of the churches.—And

(4.) For concord, communion, and love between them, upon the basis of their unity in that faith and doctrine to which they all look for their common salvation.

It might, however, be thought that these sentiments were peculiar to the Swiss churches ; and, therefore, not a fair exhibition of the prevailing principles of the Reformation. But it so happens, that this confession was officially addressed, in the preface which has just been quoted, to Christians and Christian churches throughout Europe ; and was approved by the churches of *England, Scotland, France, the United Provinces*, and by many of *Poland, Hungary, and Germany*. Now, in these churches, there was a very great variety of religious observances, as well as differences of a higher order. Some of them, as the *Dutch* and *Genevese*, were Calvinists in doctrine, and Presbyterians in government : others as the *English*, were Episcopal ; and others again, as the *German*, a sort of medium between Episcopacy and Presbytery.

Here, then, we have the larger part of Protestant Christendom, proclaiming with one mouth, and at a moment when the Spirit of God and of glory rested conspicuously upon them, that the greatest of their differences, and many of them were not trifles, were not great enough to interrupt their communion, or diminish their love: but were all to be absorbed in the importance, all to disappear in the light, of that grace and truth which made them **ONE** in **CHRIST JESUS**. Nay, that were they, for such causes, to separate from each others' fellowship, they should be guilty of a **NEFARIOUS SCHISM**. And none of them were more free, cheerful, and decided, in asserting the obligation of this catholic communion, than the *Calvinistic Presbyterians*!

Such a concurrence of public opinion and feeling, was nothing more than a concentration of that private opinion and feeling which then pervaded the church of God. The time had not come when orthodox creeds were a party *inheritance*. It was reserved for after ages to cherish a *hereditary* veneration for confessions of faith at variance, in material points, with the actual state of principle in the churches which receive them. The spectacle, now so familiar, was not yet exhibited, of *contention for everything in a confession as for a consecrated trust*;

and of violent opposition to many of those very same things in practical life—the curious and humiliating spectacle of tender affection displayed toward it as a “dead letter,” and of unremitting hostility to those who would bring it forth in its energy as a “quickeningspirit.”

It may not be improper to give an example or two, for the sake of readers who have not access to the original sources of information. LUTHER, in a preface from his own pen to the *Bohæmic* confession, which, it will be remembered, comprehends the faith of the WALDENSES, has the following remarks concerning the churches of the Reformation.

“We ought to give the greatest possible thanks to the God and Father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who, according to the riches of his glory, hath commanded to shine out of darkness this light of his word, by which he would again destroy death, and illumine life among us: and to congratulate both them,” (*the Waldenses*,) “and ourselves, that we, who were far apart, are now, by the destruction of the *parting-wall of suspicion, whereby we seemed heretics to each other*, brought near together, and gathered into one fold under that one shepherd and bishop of our souls, who is blessed forever, amen!

“But if certain differences” from other churches, “occur in this confession of theirs concerning rites and ceremonies, or celibacy, let us remember, that all the rites and observances of all the churches never were, nor could be, the same. Such an agreement is not permitted by the various circumstances of time, place, and men ; only let the doctrine of *faith and morals* be preserved. For this ought to be the same as Paul frequently admonishes ; ‘*Speak all the same thing,*’ saith he. Again, ‘*That with one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*’ For that marriage should be among them,” the Waldenses, “as it is among us, their state and condition does not allow. In the meantime, it is sufficient, that what is lawful to all, is not taught to be sin to any, and is believed, without injury to individual faith and conscience.”

In a letter, 1535, to these same brethren of the Waldenses in Bohemia, MELANCTHON thus writes :

“Since we agree in the *principal articles* of Christian doctrine, let us embrace each other with mutual love. Nor ought dissimilitude and variety of rites and ceremonies to sever our affections. Paul often discourses concerning ceremonies, and forbids *Christians* to fall

out on account of their variety, although the *world* fight furiously about them.

“As to my own feelings toward you, be assured, that I most earnestly wish that those who love the gospel, and desire to glorify the name of Christ, would cultivate mutual love to each other; and so, by their common endeavors, make their doctrine redound to the glory of Christ, that they may not destroy themselves by domestic feuds and discords, especially on account of things for which it is not necessary to excite disturbance.”

By “things for which Christians ought not to raise disturbance,” Melancthon evidently understands all things which belong not to the “principal articles of Christian doctrine.”

But among all the reformers, no one stands forth a more conspicuous advocate for Catholic communion than JOHN CALVIN.

His *Institutes of the Christian religion*, first published in 1536, and dedicated to FRANCIS the I. of France, are a professed commentary upon that little doctrinal abstract, called “the Apostles’ creed.” On the article concerning the “*Holy Catholic church, and communion of saints*,” which forms the basis of his fourth book, he discusses, at length, in his first chapter, this whole subject of church-communion. He refutes the arguments which are used at

this hour, for separate communions—And he maintains, with that point and decision which so eminently characterize his pen, that it is not lawful, but most unlawful—subversive of Christian unity, and an affront to the majesty in the heavens, to withdraw, upon any pretext whatever, from communion with other churches which are sound in the *substantial* faith.

Nothing could more ornament this work than the insertion of his entire chapter. But as it would extend to at least fifty pages, which would far exceed the limits of quotation; and as it is, like the most of his writings, too dense for abridgement, the reader must put up with a passage or two, merely as a specimen, and be referred to the chapter itself for more full satisfaction.

“Where the preached gospel is reverently heard, and the sacraments are not neglected, there, during such time, there is no deceitful nor ambiguous appearance of a church, of which no man is permitted to despise the authority, to disregard the admonitions, to resist the advices, or to mock the chastisements much less to revolt from her, and to break her unity. For the Lord lays so much stress upon communion with his church, as to account that man a fugitive and a deserter from religion,

who shall contumaciously alienate himself from *any Christian society which only cherishes the true ministry of the word and sacraments*. He so recommends her authority, as to reckon the violation thereof a diminution of his own," which 1 Tim. 3. 15. Eph. 1. 23. 5. 27. are produced to prove. Calvin then proceeds, "Whence it follows that a departure from the church is a denial of God and of Christ. Wherefore we ought to be the more on our guard against so wicked a dissention. Because, while we endeavor, as much as in us lies, to effect the ruin of God's truth, we deserve to be crushed by the lightnings of his wrath. A more atrocious crime cannot be imagined, than to violate, with sacrilegious perfidy, the conjugal union which the only begotten Son of God has deigned to contract with us."

Again. "Our assertion, that the pure ministry of the word and the pure celebration of the sacraments, is a sufficient pledge and earnest of our safety in embracing, as a church, the society in which they shall both be found, goes so far as this, that she is never to be renounced so long as she shall persevere in them, *although, in other respects, she may abound in faults*. Even in the administration of doctrine or sacraments, some defect may possibly creep in; which yet ought not

to alienate us from her communion. For all the heads of true doctrine are not of the same rank. Some are so necessary to be known, that they must be fixed and undisputed by all, as the characteristic points of religion. Such as, that 'there is one God'—that 'Christ is God, and the Son of God'—that 'our salvation depends upon the mercy of God,' and the like. There are others which, although subjects of controversy among the churches, do not destroy the unity of the faith. If, for example, one church, without the lust of contention, or obstinacy in asserting its own opinion, should think that the souls of believers departing from the body speed their flight immediately to heaven : another, not daring to determine any thing about their *place*, holds it nevertheless for certain that they live to the Lord.—What two churches should fall out on such a matter as this ? When Paul says, '*Let us, as many as are perfect, be of one mind : if in anything ye are of different mind, the Lord shall reveal this also to you ;*' does he not sufficiently indicate, that disagreement in things not so very necessary, ought not to be a source of division among Christians ? To agree throughout is, indeed, our first attainment : but since no man is perfectly free from the clouds of ignorance, we either shall leave no church at all, or we must

forgive mistakes in those things where ignorance may prevail without violating the substance of religion, or hazarding the loss of salvation. I would not here be understood to patronize even the minutest errors, nor to express an opinion that they ought to be cherished, in the slightest degree, by flattery or connivance. But I say that we may not, on account of smaller disagreements, rashly forsake any church wherein is preserved sound and unhurt, that doctrine which forms the safeguard of piety, and that use of the sacraments instituted by the Lord.”

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“In bearing with imperfections of life, our indulgence must proceed much further. For we are here on very slippery ground, and Satan lies in wait for us with no ordinary machinations. There always have been some who, imbued with a false persuasion of their absolute sanctity, as if they had become a sort of supernatural beings, disdained the society of all men in whom they perceived the remains of human infirmity. Such, in old time, were the *Cathari*, and (who came very near their madness) the *Donatists*. Such, at this day, are some of the *Anabaptists*, who would fain appear to have made greater proficiency than their neighbors. There are others who

go wrong more from an inconsiderate zeal for righteousness, than from such senseless pride. For when they see, that the fruits of practical life among those who enjoy the gospel, do not correspond with its doctrine, they immediately judge that no church is there. The offence is indeed very just; and we, in this most wretched age, give but too much occasion for it: nor can we excuse our cursed sloth, which the Lord will not permit to go unpunished; as he has already begun to chasten it with heavy stripes. (Wo, therefore, to us who, by our enormities, wound the weak conscience!) But, on the other hand, they whom I have mentioned, sin in their turn, by not knowing how to set limits to their offence. For where the Lord requires clemency, they, without regarding it, abandon themselves to immoderate severity. For because they do not think the church is where there is not solid purity and integrity of life, through their very hatred of crimes they quit the lawful church under the idea of shunning the faction of the ungodly.”

* * * * *

“I do not deny that it is the duty of a pious man to withdraw from all private intimacy with the wicked; to entangle himself with them by no voluntary bonds. But it is one thing to avoid familiarity with bad men;

another, out of dislike for them, to renounce communion with the church. As to their deeming it sacrilege to participate with such in the bread of the Lord, they are much more rigid in that particular than Paul, &c.”

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“ But although this temptation sometimes besets good men through an inconsiderate zeal for righteousness, yet we shall find, that too great moroseness springs more from pride and haughtiness, and a false opinion of one’s own sanctity, than from true holiness, and the true study of it. So that they who are most daring and forward in promoting defection from a church, have, for the most part, no other inducement than to display their superior goodness by their contempt of every one else.”

Thus CALVIN.—But before we leave him, it will be proper to notice two or three things which may be supposed to diminish the value of his testimony. For it may be said, that his “*Institutes*,” being the work of a very young man, want that stamp and seal of authority which are impressed by mature age—that they contain the views and feelings of an individual, who, however distinguished, was still but *one*—and that his strictures relate to the communion of a Christian with his *own*

church, and not to his communion with *other* churches, or to their intercommunion between themselves.

The first of these objections might be disposed of promptly. No competent judge, who has read the "Institutes," and has not sold himself to prejudice or faction, would willingly endanger the credit of his own understanding at *fifty*, by questioning the intellectual maturity of CALVIN at *twenty-four*. The objection, however, has no place. Subsequent reflection, observation, and experience, served only to confirm his earlier judgment. In a letter to his friend FARELL, three years afterwards, he has the following expressions: "I only insisted upon this, that they," the pious, "should not schismatically rend asunder any church; which, although extremely corrupt in morals, and even infected with strange doctrines, had not entirely revolted from that doctrine in which Paul teaches that the church of Christ is founded."

To return to the "Institutes." It is plain, from their history, that they bear the richest and ripest fruits which the mind of their author had cultivated. Upon none of his productions did he bestow so much pains and labor as upon this. It is in reality his *chef-d'œuvre*; and so he himself considered it.

He was, therefore, continually revising and retouching it, as it ran through various editions, for the space of twenty-three years; and it received its finishing from his elegant pen in 1559, when he was *fifty* years old, only five years before his death.

That he was but *one* is true; yet a truth of no importance to the argument; unless it could be demonstrated that he stood alone. How different the fact was, the preceding pages have already proved. And this very work, as published in French and Latin, was drawn up in behalf of the French churches, to show what sort of doctrine they believed and taught; so that it is, in some measure, a work of *public authority*; and it obtained the unbounded applause and approbation of both the learned and religious world. Even the fastidious SCALIGER, who seldom praised any body but himself, or any thing but his own, was among its admirers and eulogists. It was translated into *Italian, German, Flemish, Spanish, and English*: and so often republished in the original Latin, that Mons. Masson, by a strong hyperbole, says, it was printed “a *thousand* times.” Calvin himself informs us, that it met with the most encouraging reception from the Christian public—“with such favor from *almost all the pious*,” they are his

own words, "as he had not dared even to wish, far less to expect." It appears, then, that his views of communion were the views of reformed Europe, or the work which contains them would never have been so popular in the churches.

The idea that the communion referred to, is communion with one's *own* particular church, and not with other churches, either by admitting their members or joining in their ordinances, has nothing to support it, but flies in the face of the very chapter which discusses the subject. Its title is, "*Of the TRUE CHURCH with which we are to cultivate unity; because she is the mother of ALL THE PIOUS*"—a designation belonging only to the ONE church of God, and not to any sect. And the third part of that chapter is devoted to the proof of this proposition, "*That we are in no manner to forsake the Catholic church and the communion of saints.*" "*On which account,*" it is added, "*the errors of the NOVATIANS, ANABAPTISTS, and other SCHISMATICAL and IDLE-MINDED MEN, concerning this doctrine, are abundantly refuted.*" But what CALVIN calls the "errors of the Novatians," &c., are precisely the arguments urged against the communion which these pages recommend and vindicate. Therefore, the communion spoken of, is not simply that which

we ought to maintain with our own particular branch of the church, but which we ought to maintain with the *whole* church through the medium of any one of her branches to which we have access. That this is CALVIN's meaning, appears not only from the whole tenor of his discourse, but also from his anxiety expressed in a letter to Archbishop CRANMER, to unite all the reformed churches. Episcopacy was established in England; CALVIN was a divine-right Presbyterian. Yet even that difference was not sufficient, in his eyes, to hinder communion. According to the first principle of the Reformation, he was willing to compound for the pure word and worship of God, i. e. in its substance. For, in a letter of Oct. 22, 1548, he congratulates the Lord Protector of England, on his having been a principal instrument in "restoring the pure and sincere worship of God, and the sound preaching of his word." Yet in that very letter he entreats the Protector to *complete* the work of reformation; and even points out corruptions and abuses which needed the knife.

No doubt can now remain as to the nature of that communion for which CALVIN, backed by the greatest and best men of the age, so nervously and eloquently contends. And

their support of his doctrine precludes the necessity of further detail as to private opinion. Even illustrious names might seem to be introduced more for ostentation than for conviction. For in very deed, the voice of CALVIN, on this subject, is the general voice of the people of God in that age of grace and truth.

To their doctrine they added their example. I do not say that their example corresponded *perfectly* with their principles. It would be a miracle of high degree, if they who are imperfect in all things else, should be perfect in their love. Nor have I forgotten the separation of the Lutheran from the other Protestant churches. Yet this took place against the sentiments of Luther and his most distinguished associates.' It was not effected without a struggle ; and did not continue without magnanimous efforts to heal the wound.

CALVIN not only subscribed the *Augustan*, i. e. the *Lutheran* confession, as he himself informs us ; but he expressly declares, in a letter to his friend FARELL, that "the petty peculiarities" in the Lutheran church, evidently meaning that they were petty when compared with the great things of the common salvation, were no just cause of disunion.

HENRY ALTING, professor of divinity at *Heidelberg*, and afterwards at *Groningen*, and a

distinguished member of the Synod of *Dordt*, “assures us, that this was the common opinion of the reformed divines who followed **BUCER** and **CALVIN**. For, proposing this question in his problems, *whether the orthodox may lawfully communicate in the Lord’s supper with the LUTHERANS?* he resolves it in the affirmative, upon these four arguments :

“ 1. Because they all agree in fundamentals.

“ 2. Because men ought to preserve unity in the church, and hate schism.

“ 3. Because we have the example of the prophets, and of Christ and his Apostles, for communicating in more corrupt churches than the *Lutherans* are.

“ 4. Because the best divines of the last age,” the Reformation, “have approved it, as **CAPITO**, **BUCER**, **CALVIN**, **MARTYR**, **ZANCHY**, **URSIN**, **TOSSANUS**, **PARÆUS** **SCULTETUS**, and others : *some of whom, as they had occasion, DID ACTUALLY COMMUNICATE with them.*”

PETER MARTYR, a man of high standing among the reformers, went over to England at the invitation of **CRANMER** by order of **EDWARD VI.** ; and, though far enough from holding the divine right of Episcopacy, scrupled not to join in permanent communion with the church of England, and to accept a theological chair in the university of Oxford ; and that he would

as freely have communed with the *Lutherans*, had they been as forbearing as himself, may be gathered from the disapprobation with which he mentions the harsh behavior of some Lutheran ministers toward one of their brethren, for kindly receiving the *English* Protestants, when they fled from the persecutions of bloody MARY, and for communicating sometimes with the church of Friezland.

KNOX, the Scottish ELIJAH, as firm a Presbyterian as CALVIN himself, and still less indulgent to what he considered as reliques of Papal superstition—even KNOX—with all his anti-episcopal feelings, “ officiated for a considerable time in the church of England ”—assisted in revising the *Book of Common Prayer*—accepted, at *Frankfort* on the Main, the charge of a congregation composed of English exiles, differing much in their views of public worship—and, “ when the congregation had agreed to adopt the order of the Genevan church, and requested him to proceed to administer the communion according to it; although he approved of that order, he declined to carry it into practice, until their learned brethren in other places were consulted. At the same time he signified that he had not freedom to administer the sacraments agreeably to the English liturgy.” The difficulty

resulted in a compromised “form of worship, in which some things were taken from the English liturgy, and others added which were thought suitable to their circumstances. This was to continue in force until the end of the next April; and if any dispute arose in the interval, it was to be referred to five of the most celebrated foreign divines. The agreement was subscribed by all the members of the congregation; thanks were publicly returned to God for the restoration of harmony; and the communion was received as a pledge of union, and the burial of all past offences.”

It is well known to have been a favorite object with CALVIN to form a general union of all the Protestant churches. This he never could have proposed without a full conviction that they were sufficiently united in principle to be united in fact; and to reciprocate, by agreement, the most liberal and ample communion in the things of Christ. The idea of reducing them all exactly to his own standard of propriety never entered his mind. He was too much of a *Christian* to ask for so huge a sacrifice; and too much of a *statesman* to suppose it possible. His plan, as is clear from the whole drift of his writings and advices, would have been to bind them up in a great confederation; bringing them as near to each other

as the state of public habit, under the influence of mutual candor and concession, should permit; fixing them firmly there, and leaving all the rest to evangelical liberty. So that, as in old time, a Christian, passing from his own church and country to another, should be welcomed as a citizen of the kingdom of God, and should conform peaceably to the order of that province of the kingdom which should thus receive him. Could he have succeeded in removing the grosser offences which remained in some of the churches, his wishes had been fulfilled—his holy triumph completed. For as no one more thoroughly detested, or pertinaciously resisted, whatever tended, even remotely, to ensnare conscience, or to reconcile the minds of men to the superstitions and idolatry of Rome; so no one ever treated, with more majestic disregard, those unessential peculiarities about which so much heat is kindled by vanity. His critics have set down such things to the score of his *pride*, mostly if not merely, because they could not rise to the level of his magnanimity: just as they have mistaken for arrogance, that manly and subduing spirit which walks in the upper regions of light and truth. He, in effect, said to the Lutheran and English churches, Keep your “smaller observances;” let us have no discord

on their account; but let us march, in one solid column, under the Captain of salvation; and, with undivided counsels, pour in the regions of the cross upon the territory of darkness and death. “I wish,” says he, in a letter to CRANMER, “I wish it could be brought about, that men of learning and dignity from the principal churches might have a meeting; and, after a careful discussion of the several points of faith, might hand down to posterity the doctrine of the scripture settled by their common judgment. But among the greatest evils of our age this also is to be reckoned, that our churches are so distracted one from another, that human society scarcely flourishes among us, much less that holy communion between the members of Christ, which all profess in words, and few sincerely cultivate in fact.—Thus it happens, that, by the dissipation of its members, the body of the church is prostrate and mangled. As to myself, were I likely to be of any service, I should not hesitate, were it necessary, to *cross TEN seas for such a purpose*. If the question were only concerning giving aid to *England*, that would be with me a sufficiently powerful reason. Now, *when the object is to obtain such an agreement of learned men upon strict scriptural principles, as may accomplish an union of churches in other re-*

spects widely asunder, I do not think it lawful for me to decline any labors or troubles."

The reader will take notice, that this letter was written in 1551, several years before some of the principal Protestant confessions were published. The consequence was, that the churches had no proper *public* understanding. The mighty business of the reformation was carried on, and the connexion of its interests maintained, chiefly by the correspondence of *individuals* in different parts of Europe. It is this state of things in which churches, as such, hardly knew one another, that CALVIN describes, deplores, and wished to amend. Nothing is further from his meaning, then that their respective members would not commune with each other in all Christian ordinances, as they had opportunity. Repugnancies on that head were then confined to the *Lutherans* and *Anabaptists*. When the Protestant churches had, with one voice, glorified God in their good confessions of his truth, one of the measures which lay so near CALVIN'S heart was partially executed. He would have preferred a *joint-confession*, as the bond of visible union and communion. Such a confession must necessarily have excluded all local peculiarities—all minute and secondary matters: and instead of arguing the several classes of confes-

sors to be of different religious races on account of things which depend upon climate, habit, state of society, and such like incidents, would have marked their common origin by their essential resemblance. Varieties not affecting the substance of religion would have been no better reason with them for questioning a man's relation to them, and his claim upon their holiest fellowship, than tawny skin or crisped hair is, with believers in God's word, for denying to be of their own species and entitled to their kind offices, one who has their bones, sinews, flesh, face, voice, faculties, and other proper attributes of human nature. This is a scheme worthy of reformers. It was CALVIN'S: it is the BIBLE'S.

What this lover of peace with truth projected upon a large scale, was actually attempted and executed, after his death, upon a smaller one; sufficient, however, to show which way the current of Christian charity was setting in.

The agreement of Poland, (*Poloniæ consensus*) at the Synod of *Sendomir*, in 1570, six years after CALVIN'S decease, embracing the churches of greater and lesser *Poland*, which were organized under the *Augsburgh* or Lutheran confession, and under the *Helvetic* or Swiss confession, what would now be called Calvinistic; as also under the confession of the

WALDENSES, was bottomed upon those comprehensive principles which supported the plan of CALVIN.

This consensus was for the express purpose of wiping away the reproach of their enemies, and of promoting brotherly concord and communion on the ground of their agreement in the leading truths of the gospel; all things else being matters of forbearance.

“Of this holy and mutual agreement,” say they, “we have thought and agreed that it would be a confirmation, if as they,” the *Lutherans*, “bear witness that we, and our church, and our confession, published in this Synod, and the churches and confession of the brethren,” (*Waldenses*) “are orthodox; so also we should manifest the same Christian love toward their churches, and should acknowledge their orthodoxy: and should, on both sides, abandon and consign to silence, all quarrels, distractions, and dissensions, by which the course of the gospel, to the very great offence of many pious people, is hindered; and by which no light occasion is furnished to our adversaries, both of calumniating ourselves, and of opposing our true Christian religion. It is rather our duty to study the public peace and tranquility; to exercise mutual charity; and to employ, according to our brotherly union,

our mutual efforts for the edification of the church.

“ We, moreover, pledge ourselves to use our utmost endeavors to persuade and invite all our brethren to embrace, respect, and preserve this our Christian and unanimous agreement ; and to cherish and seal it *especially by hearing of the word, (in frequenting the assemblies of both confessions,) and by the use of the sacraments : always observing good order, and the rule both of discipline and custom in each of the churches respectively.*

“ But the rites and ceremonies of each church we do, by this our hearty consent, leave free. For it makes little difference what *rites* are observed, provided the fundamental doctrine of our faith and salvation be untouched and uncorrupted, as the *Augustan* and *Saxon* confession teach on that head ; and as we have expressed the same in this our confession, published in the present Synod of Sendomir.

“ And to complete this our consent and agreement, we have thought that, in order to preserve this our brotherly association, it will not be inconvenient to meet at some appointed place, where we may together form a compend of doctrine taken from our mutual confessions ; and publish it to the world to stop

the mouths of invidious men, and minister great consolation to all the pious.

“ Having, therefore, given to each other the right hand of union, we have all most sacredly promised and pledged ourselves, to cultivate, nourish, and daily to aim at increasing, our peace and faith, to the building up the kingdom of God ; and that we will shun all occasions of distracting the churches. Finally, we have pledged ourselves, that regardless of selfish considerations, as becomes the true ministers of God, we will promote only the glory of JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR; and will propagate the truth of his gospel in word and deed.”

Next comes a prayer for the divine blessing; then the subscriptions to this agreement: and the instrument closes with the 1st verse of the cxxxiii psalm—“ *Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity !!*”

A few days after the ratification of this *consensus*, viz., on the Lord's day, the 28th of May, 1570, it was carried into effect in the following manner: viz., “ The ministers, patrons, and whole congregation of the Bohæmic confession, both *Poles* and *Germans* of both sexes, proceeded in a body from their own to the *Lutheran* place of worship, to attend

morning service ; and there, the hearers of both parties being solemnly assembled, two of the *Waldensian* ministers preached, one to the *Poles*, the other to the *Germans*. In the same way, in the afternoon, the congregation of the *Augustan* confession, with their patrons and ministers, having made a procession from their church through the city, went to the church of the Bohemian brethren, in the suburbs, the *Poles* to the Poles, the *Germans* to the Germans ; and there two Lutheran ministers preached to them the word of God. In each place, after reading the agreement, the ministers gave their attestation aloud to the holy concord and union ; and exhorted their hearers on both sides to cherish and guard it as a singular gift of God ; and, laying aside all groundless suspicions of each other, now that they had become one in the Lord and in his truth, to keep his way, and cultivate brotherly love. This was accompanied with ardent prayers to God, and with the greatest joy and acclamation of all present, exclaiming, ‘ *Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity !!* ’ Finally, the whole being made one church, sung with one voice that hymn of exultation and thanksgiving, ‘ We praise thee, O God, &c.’ ” This “ agreement,” was unanimously confirmed in

a general Synod at Cracow, Sept. 1573. And, as the conclusion of their business, “The whole Synod, the brethren, superintendents, elders, ministers, patrons, and all the rest, ratified and sealed that holy consent and union; and, finally, after joining together in public worship, and *in the communion of the body and blood of the Lord, according to the ceremonies of the church at Cracow*, they returned home, rejoicing in brotherly love, and praising the Lord.”

This same agreement was reconfirmed in a general Synod at *Petrikow*, a town of Great Poland, June, 1578, and a regulation there made, that a congregation of either confession, (Lutheran or Calvinist,) might freely call a minister from the other.

The renewal of the agreement was repeated in a general Synod at *Uladislaw*, 1583; and again at *Tornaw*, in Hungary, 1595, and continued to be religiously observed as late, at least, as 1634.

This spirit was not confined to Poland. Of all the Protestant churches, none did more and suffered more for the faith of Christ than the churches of France. Purer in doctrine, fairer in government, and chaster in discipline, the world never saw. Their treasure and their blood flowed alike, and flowed freely in

the cause of their Redeemer. And none were more forward in that labor of love, the union of Christian churches in one great spiritual commonwealth.

It appears, from the records of the Synod of *St. Foy*, 1578, that an assembly of many deputies from sundry famous reformed churches, kingdoms, and provinces, at which attended Mr. **ESNARD**, as a representative from several French churches, met at *Franckfort*, in 1577, by invitation of the Prince Elector **JOHN CASIMIR**, prince *Palatine*, and duke of *Bavaria*—that they laid down several means and expedients for *uniting all the reformed churches in Christendom in one common bond of union*; as also for terminating the differences which had risen up and were fomented among them by their common adversaries; and for hindering some hot-headed and bigotted divines from condemning, as they had threatened, even to *Anathema*, the greatest and soundest part by far of the Christian reformed churches—and, for the suppression of such imprudent and wicked designs, unanimously resolved to petition the princes of the empire, who adhered to the confession of *Auxbourg*, i. e., the *Lutheran* princes—and had, moreover, given an express charge, that one uniform confession of faith should be framed, as the general and

common confession of all Protestants; and several copies of it sent to all those kingdoms and provinces in which those churches were gathered, to be examined and approved by them, and to be crowned by their joint consent and approbation.”—It appears also, “that they had agreed upon the time and place for the meeting of deputies from the churches concerned, and that they had sent a special invitation to the French churches to send thither persons of approved piety, integrity, and experience, with full powers to treat and decide on all points of doctrine, and other matters concerning the union, peace, and preservation of the churches, and the pure worship of God.”

This proposal was received with great satisfaction by the general Synod of the French churches; and four ministers, together with the “most illustrious Lord Viscount of *Turenne*,” were appointed commissioners to the general meeting of deputies.

The same design was prosecuted by the Synod of FIGEAC, in 1579, at which the confession of faith of the *Dutch* and *French* churches in the low countries was approved; and a consultation was held on the most proper means to “reunite the several confessions of all those nations which agree in doctrine, into one com-

mon confession, and which may hereafter be approved by all those nations. And this pursuant to the project laid down in the late conference at *Neustadt*, Sept. 1577."

With equal willingness the Synod of *Vitré*, 1583, embraced a proposition made in their own body for "an union and agreement between the churches of *Germany* and theirs-- they solicited Mr. *Chandieu* to undertake a mission for that purpose; and Mr. *Salnar*, after conference with Lord DU PLESSIS, to write in their name and by their authority on the subject, to the princes and divines of *Germany*.

Twenty years afterwards, viz. in 1603, at the Synod of *Gap*, the brethren of *Dauphiny* "desired that some means might be contrived for a conference and union with the *Lutheran* churches in *Germany*, that so the schism between them and the *French* churches might be removed." Whereupon, the assembly "desirous to see the fruits of such a noble project, ordered letters to be despatched to the orthodox universities of *Germany*, *England*, *Geneva*, *Basil*, and *Leyden*; and to *Messieurs des Gourdon* and *de Fontaines*, in *London*, entreating them to co-operate in effecting this holy union; and that princes might be engaged to put forth their authority therein, that so they, the Pro-

testant churches, might all be more firmly united among themselves in the confession of one and the same doctrine.”

This zeal was quickened by a proposal for such an union made by king *James the VI.* to the *French* churches, obscurely hinted in a letter from his majesty of March 15th, 1614; and fully explained, on his authority, by Mr. *David Hume*, “for reuniting the churches of divers nations into one and the selfsame confession and doctrine.” At their general Synod, held at *Tonneins* the May following, they drew the outlines of a detailed plan of union, in which the following are conspicuous features :

1. To avoid the *Arminian* controversy.

For they say, that instead of disputes about religion, “it were better to lay on the table, before the assembled delegates, the several confessions of the reformed churches of *England*, *Scotland*, *France*, the *Netherlands*, *Switzerland*, and the *Palatinate*, &c. ; and that, out of all these confessions, there might be framed one in common to them all, in which divers points may be omitted, the knowledge whereof is not needful to our everlasting happiness. Among which the controversy moved by *Piscator*, and several subtil opinions broached by *VAN ARMIN*,” (*Arminius*), “about free will, the saints’ perseverance, and predestination, may be reckoned.”

2. To avoid contentions about *ceremonies and church-government*—which they call “*quilllets* :” i. e. subtleties, niceties : in regard to which they say “A mutual declaration should be made, and added unto the said confession, by which the said deputies, in the names of their principals, do declare, that the churches *shall not judge nor condemn one another for this difference, it not hindering our mutual agreement in the same faith and doctrine ; and that for all this, we may cordially embrace each other as true believers and joint-members of one and the same body.*”

Thus far the business was to proceed among deputies from the reformed churches only. They were to conclude after “a most religious fast,” with the celebration of the Lord’s supper, “wherein the pastors from *England* and the other nations should all communicate together.” And then to disperse, after appointing another day for a new meeting within the year, that they might have an opportunity of consulting their respective constituents.

During the interval, means were to be used for securing the attendance of some *Lutheran* livines at this second assembly : and in such an expectation it was agreed,

3. To waive the points in debate between the *reformed* and the *Lutherans* : i. e. to ex-

press the doctrine on these points in terms which might be safe for conscientious, and satisfactory to modest men : and, for this end, to model their agreement after the *Poloniæ consensus*, or “ concordat of the Polish churches, made at *Sendomir*, in the year 1570.”

This second assembly, like the first, was to open with a solemn fast, and to close “ with the celebration of the holy supper of our Lord, at which, both the *Lutheran* and other ministers should communicate together.”

On this plan for Protestant union, it may be proper to remark,

First. That it did not contemplate merely the reciprocation of ministerial and Christian fellowship in the several churches, for *that* had been in regular practice among Protestants all along : the majority of the *Lutherans* excepted. It went much further ; even to the organization of the whole Protestant interest in a public federative union ; each of the component churches retaining, however, its own independence and internal order. It was, in fact, Calvin’s plan revived, or rather prosecuted ; for it does not appear to have been ever abandoned.

Secondly. That it furnished no proof of the French churches, which were the most active in promoting it, having at all declined from

their soundness in the faith, or their zeal in maintaining it. For, three years afterwards, their general Synod of *Vitré*, appointed commissioners to attend the Synod of *Dordt* for the purpose of deciding on the several points of the *Arminian* controversy; and, three years after this, viz. at their general Synod held in the town of *Alez*, 1620, they *unanimously* approved the articles agreed upon at *Dordt*; incorporated them with their own canons, and ordered them to be “sworn and subscribed to by the pastors and elders of their churches, and by the doctors and professors in their universities; and, also by all those that were to be ordained and admitted into the ministry, or into the professor’s chair, in any of their universities; with a proviso, that if any one of these persons should reject, either in whole or in part, the doctrine contained in, and decided by, the canons of the said council,” of *Dordt*; “or refuse to take the oath of consent and approbation, he should not be admitted into any office or employment, either in their churches or universities.” Thus unequivocally did they assert, and take care to perpetuate in their schools and pulpits, the pure doctrine of the gospel. But to show how well they could unite catholicism with fidelity—the love of the

brethren with the love of truth; and how cordially they could take to their bosom the very persons against whose errors they raised the voice of their testimony, provided those errors subverted not the foundation of their faith, the following extract from the minutes of the second Synod of *Charenton*, in 1631, will amply suffice :

“ An act in favor of the LUTHERAN brethren.”

“ The province of Burgundy demanding, Whether the faithful of the AUGUSTANE confession might be permitted to contract marriages in our churches, and to present children in our churches unto baptism, without a previous abjuration of those opinions held by them contrary to the belief of our churches? this Synod declareth that, inasmuch as the churches of the confession of Ausbourg do agree with the other reformed churches in the principal and fundamental points of the true religion, and that there is neither superstition nor idolatry in their worship; the faithful of the said confession, who with a spirit of love and peaceableness do join themselves to the communion of our churches in this kingdom, may be, without any abjuration at all made by them, admitted unto the Lord’s table with us; and, as sureties, may present children unto baptism; they promising the

consistory, that they will never solicit them, either directly or indirectly, to transgress the doctrine believed and professed in our churches; but will be content to instruct and educate them in those points and articles which are in common between us and them, and wherein both the *Lutherans* and we are unanimously agreed."

If from France we pass into Holland, we shall there find the same generous feeling toward all the parts of the church of God. Her early confession, the *Belgic*, already quoted, shows in what light she contemplated the privilege and duty of church-communion. That confession, as has been stated, received the unqualified approbation of the continental divines at the Synod of *Dordt*, in 1618; and it received also, with the exception of its articles upon church-government, the approbation of the Episcopal divines who were sent thither by JAMES VI.

The assembling of such a Synod, and their harmonious proceedings, are the best practical commentary upon the understood principle of Protestant communion. Here was a collection of representatives from the reformed churches of Europe, France excepted, whose deputies were stopped by a mandate of the king; various in their modifications of order and rites

of worship, yet one in the common faith of the gospel. *Dutch, German, Genevese, Swiss*, all non-episcopal, joined by an English bishop and other Episcopal delegates, met together to discuss and decide one of the most serious and shaking controversies that ever agitated the church of God. Here they unite in the most solemn acts of ministerial communion. The public prayers are offered up by Presbyterians in their own manner. By way of showing their concord and confidence, they judge it expedient to have now and then sermons in Latin before the Synod. They begin with requesting the *foreign divines* to undertake this service in order. And the very first man they place in the pulpit is Dr. JOSEPH HALL, a high-toned Episcopalian, then Dean of *Worcester*, and afterwards Bishop of *Norwich*. He preached to them from *Eccles. vii. 16*. In his sermon he calls the Synod, thus composed, “a most holy assembly of the prophets.” The church of *Holland*, upon the supposition of her adhering to “the faith which she had till then received, and to the confession common to her with the other churches;” he salutes as the “pure spouse of Christ.” And then exclaims, “we are brethren, let us also be associates! What have we to do with the disgraceful titles of *Remon-*

strants, Contra-Remonstrants, Calvinists, Arminians? We are *Christians*, let us also be of one soul. We are one body, let us also be of one mind. By that tremendous name of the Almighty God—by the pious and gentle bosom of our common mother—by your own souls—by the most holy compassions of JESUS CHRIST our Saviour; aim at peace, brethren; enter into peace, that laying aside all prejudice, party-spirit, and evil affections, we may all come to a happy agreement in the same truth.”

On these extracts, which are in the general strain of the sermon, it may not be unseasonable to remark :

1. That the reformed churches, Episcopal and non-episcopal, had no scruple, in those days, of joining with each other in acts of public worship, according to their respective usages. Much less did any of them look upon any other as not being true churches, and upon their ministry and ordinances as unlawful and invalid. Such a notion concerning churches without Episcopal order and ordination, had not yet infected the church of *England*, and curdled in her breasts the milk of Christian kindness. Her representatives at *Dordt*, explicitly call the ministers of the

Dutch church, “beloved brethren and *fellow-ministers*.”

2. The views and feelings expressed by Dr. Hall corresponded entirely with those of the whole Synod; for they call his discourse “most learned and accurate,” and gave him public thanks for it. So that, considering how the Synod was constituted, it may be taken as an *official expression of the views and feelings of reformed Europe*. And when this most venerable assembly, inferior in learning, talent, holiness, and dignity, to none that had preceded it since the great council of *Nice*, was about breaking up; the members mutually gave each other the “right hand of brotherly communion,” and parted with embracings and tears. Here was the most solemn formula, (the right hand of fellowship) known in the church of God for receiving and acknowledging each other as brethren in Christ and in the gospel of Christ—the most sacred pledge of Christian and ministerial communion. Can a shadow of doubt remain after the testimony of such a fact? Is it a tolerable question, whether such men, or the ministers and members of the churches they represented, would sit down together at the Lord’s table?

As to the church of *Holland*, it is well known, that she practiced the liberal communion of

which those illustrious deputies sanctioned the principle, and set an example. For her members before this communicated with the **BROWNISTS**, the English independents who fled from ecclesiastical oppression in their own country ; although, by a singular inconsistency, the Brownist teachers would not consent to reciprocate the communion any further than in prayer and hearing the word : and that in the face of their own protestation wherein they say, “ We account the reformed churches as true and genuine ; *We profess communion with them in the sacred things of God ; and, as much as in us lies, we cultivate it.*” An inconsistency which, it is heartily to be wished, had stood alone ; and, deeply to be regretted, has been kept in countenance by the professions and practice of later days : but which, at that time, was equalled only by the inconsistency of the government of England, in supporting, cherishing, comforting, honoring the non-episcopal churches abroad ; and discouraging, harassing, crushing the very same sort of churches at home.

The church of *Holland* was not only ready to communicate in the sacraments with the English dissenters, as well as with the establishment, but actually appointed one of the former, the learned and excellent Dr. WIL-

LIAM AMES, a professor of theology in the university of *Franecker*. The same honor proffered thirty years after, i. e. in 1651, to that holy man of God, SAMUEL RUTHERFORD, of *St. Andrews* in *Scotland*, when she invited him to the professor's chair in the city of *Utrecht*. In fact, the churches of *Holland* and *Scotland*, like the reformed churches on the continent, considered and treated each other as parts of a common whole; and furnished, by their connection and intercourse, as they had opportunity, a sample of that catholic communion to which the obligation is so clearly asserted in their confessions.

The aspect of the British churches was much less inviting. Even in the early part of the reign of ELIZABETH, untender, not to say violent, measures were adopted toward those who had conscientious objections to some observances in the establishment. But still the great Protestant principle of communion was not renounced; it was not the *nature*, but the *application* of that principle, which produced so much scruple on one side, and so much oppression on the other. With all their coercive zeal toward their own dissentients, neither the civil nor ecclesiastical government of England thought of denying the lawfulness and the duty of communion between the Pro-

testant churches, notwithstanding their variations from each other in smaller things. This was sufficiently manifest, as has been noticed, by their conduct relative to the Synod of *Dordt*. Their error lay in making matter of compulsion toward their own people, what was matter of forbearance toward all others—in supposing that certain diversities found, by experience, to be innocent on the continent, must necessarily be criminal, if not fatal, in *England*. And they carried so far their passion for *unity*, as to destroy it by indiscreet means of enforcing it. All this was an abuse, gross indeed, but still an *abuse* of a sound and salutary principle. It was reserved for the times, the temper, and the influence of bishop LAUD, to reject the principle itself. That able and intrepid, but fierce and unpitied prelate, set himself to pervert the faith of the church of England; to break off her connection with foreign Protestants; to corrupt her worship by assimilating it in every possible manner, with the Popish ritual; and, by dint of power, to effect an external uniformity over the island, at the expense of producing real division, bitter feuds, public weakness, and private misery. The very next year after his elevation to the see of Canterbury, (1634,) Lord *Scudamore*, instead of going to the Protestant church at

Charenton, as had been the previous practice of the English ambassadors at the French courts, “furnished his chapel after the new fashion,” (*Laud’s*) “with candles upon the altar, &c.; and took care to publish, upon all occasions, that *the church of ENGLAND looked not on the Huguenots as a part of their communion.*”

This was the first instance in which one of the reformed churches openly renounced the fellowship of another. It was a melancholy deed, and a melancholy day. The alarm which it created among foreign Protestants in England, and the indignation which it excited on the continent, proved how well established had been the doctrine of Protestant communion, and how precious it was in the eyes of Protestant churches. By that fatal act, *England* forfeited her pre-eminence as the “bulwark of the reformation,” and became an object of disgust to the foreign churches; insomuch, that in her subsequent tribulations, she could scarcely command their pity: whereas, before this infatuated act of selfishness and schism, she held the first rank in their respect and affection.

To those who are acquainted with the history of this disastrous period, it would be superfluous to detail the mercies of *Laud*, and

the mysteries of the *Star-chamber*. To those who have not such an acquaintance, our limits do not allow us to present even an imperfect sketch : and perhaps the nature of this volume forbids the attempt. Suffice it to observe, that the contests in the church of England between the high-handed conformists and their demurring brethren, furnished proof, and not refutation, of the doctrine here advanced in favor of catholic communion. No whim, nor abuse, nor corruption, which they were not required to *approve*, severed the Puritans from the Established Church. They grieved, they mourned, they expostulated, about things which afflicted their consciences ; but they thought not of separation. Had they been allowed to exonerate themselves from the charge of countenancing what, in all sincerity, they disallowed ; or, had they not been commanded to belie their conviction by an explicit approbation of what they abhorred, the name of dissenters from the church of England had never been known. Unepiscopal in their judgment they certainly were ; as were all the continental Protestants, and all the fathers of the British reformation. They disliked, they loathed, certain exterior observances ; but still, had they been permitted to dislike and to loathe without exciting public disturbance

—had they not been required to deny what they believed to be truth, and to profess what they believed to be falsehood—had not the price of their peace in the establishment been rated so high as the perjury of their souls before God, they had never been separated from the church of England. As it was, they did not *retire*, they were *driven* from her bosom: and they have thus left upon record their testimony of martyrdom to the sacredness of that communion which belongs to the church of God, and to the criminality of dividing it upon slight pretexts. The same thing may be said of the rent begun in 1732, in the church of *Scotland*. The Seceders did not voluntarily *withdraw*, they were *expelled*. Had the Commission of the General Assembly, and the General Assembly itself known their own interests—had they listened more to the counsels of Christian peace than to the pride of a secular establishment, the church of Scotland had been “one and indivisible.” But, like England with her *Laud* and her *Star-chamber*, she chose to be ferocious: and she broke the golden chain of her unity, perhaps never to be repaired till those days of the “Son of man” which, according to his word, we confidently expect. In the meantime has happened what the nature of

human passions might forewarn us to anticipate: grievance has been accumulated upon grievance, and complaint upon complaint. The point of honor with the devotees of the establishment is to heap contempt on the separatists; and, with the devotees of separation, to degrade the establishment. And thus, while "high church," on both sides of the *Tweed*, deals out its proscriptions more in the spirit of the world than in the bowels of Christ, the compliment is returned by their antagonists with hearty good will. Many things are *now* alleged to *justify* dissent from the church of *England*, and secession from the church of *Scotland*, which, we *know*, were not among the original causes of disunion. And so it is with *all* parties after their disagreement had become inveterate. This is humiliating, but it is true. And the arm of TRUTH must not be unnerved, light her blow where it may.

To return. The church of England continued in this uncomfortable state. Power persecuting right, and right remonstrating to power—the secular hierarchy commanding, and the scriptural conscience disobeying and suffering, till that memorable epoch in the reign of CHARLES I.—the meeting of the Assembly of divines at *Westminster*, in 1643.

This Assembly was called for the express purpose of reforming more perfectly “the discipline, liturgy, and government of the church,” so that “such a government might be settled in the church as should be most agreeable to God’s holy word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the church at home, and nearer agreement with the church of *Scotland*, and other reformed churches abroad.”

The assembly was originally composed of Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Independents; with commissioners, both lay and clerical, from the church of Scotland. The Episcopal divines withdrew at an early period of their discussions, viz., before the introduction of the “*Solemn league and covenant*,” and the number of Independents was but small; so that the business of the assembly was managed principally by the Presbyterians.

On the form of church-government there was much difference of judgment, long and warm debate, and great embarrassment.

In the body of Christian *doctrine* there was almost a perfect harmony. A few members objected to “some expressions relating to *reprobation*, to the *imputation of the active as well as passive obedience of Christ*; and to several passages in the chapters of *liberty of conscience*

and church discipline; but the confession, as far as it related to *articles of faith*, passed the Assembly and Parliament by a very great majority;" and was, without exception, adopted by the church of Scotland. The Independents, when, they formed themselves into a separate body, thirteen years afterwards, i. e., in 1658, published a confession of faith, called the *Savoy confession*, which, for substance, is the same as the Assembly's. "They have omitted all those chapters in the Assembly's confession which relate to discipline; as the 30th and 31st, with part of the 20th and 24th, relating to the *power of Synods, councils, church censures, marriage and divorce, and the power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion.*" But "upon the whole, the difference between these two confessions in point of doctrine is so small, that the modern Independents have, in a manner, laid aside the use of it," (their own,) "in their families, and agreed with the Presbyterians in the use of the Assembly's catechism."

In the result, therefore, of the Westminster Assembly's deliberation—an assembly not surpassed even by the Synod of *Dordt*, or the council of *Nice*—we have the doctrinal judgment of at least the *English* Presbyterians and Independents, and of the whole church of

Scotland. That judgment in the article of church-communion is the more important, as the churches immediately concerned in the present inquiry have sprung from them; have received all of them the doctrine, many of them the government, discipline, and worship, settled by that most venerable assembly. So that when we have the doctrine of the Westminster confession of faith on the article of communion, we have the faith avowed at this moment of the church of Scotland—of both branches of the secession in that country and Ireland—of the Reformed Presbytery; of the Synod of relief in Scotland—of a large body of English Independents—and of all, or nearly all, the American churches which have descended from them: that is, we have the professed faith of all the Presbyterian churches in *Scotland, Ireland, and America* (the *Associate Reformed Church* being one,)—and of the body of English and American Independents. When we shall have settled the doctrine of communion, as taught in the Westminster confession, we shall also have settled the principle which these churches, at least the Presbyterian part of them, have solemnly adopted and promised to observe, as the rule of their ecclesiastical conduct. With this

general clue let us go to the "Confession of faith." The 26th chapter is entitled :

"Of COMMUNION OF SAINTS:"

the doctrine concerning which it lays down in the following terms :

"All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory. And, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man."

"II. Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification : as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus."

This latter section describes, apparently, the communion which ought to subsist between professed Christians in their relation to

each other as visible members of the church of God ; asserting their joint title to, and interest in, all the privileges of his house, and their duty to participate therein with each other, as they have opportunity, upon the single ground of their being followers of the Lord Jesus.

Let us view it a little more closely.

The parties are “ saints by profession :” i. e. those who make a credible profession of religion—whom, according to the rules of scriptural judgment, we are to acknowledge as fellow Christians.

The communion which they are to cherish with each other is defined in its nature, its extent, and in the principle of its application. Its *nature* is *threefold*. It consists :

1. In *social worship*.

They are *partners* with each other in all that is comprehended under “ the worship of God :” i. e. his instituted ordinances in his church.

This partnership is to be *avowed and expressed* by open acts of mutual recognition—they are “ *to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God.*”

Their recognition of each other is not a matter of choice or discretion, which they may do, or omit as they please. It is a *duty* which

they are not at liberty to forego—an imperative obligation upon their consciences—they are “*bound*” to maintain this communion.

2. In acts of *religious good-will*, which, though they fall not directly under the “worship of God,” are yet “such spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification.”

3. “In relieving each other in *outward things* according to their several abilities and necessities.”

As to the *extent* of this communion in all its branches—it is to embrace Christians as such :

1. Of every denomination—even “all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.”

2. Of every country and clime—even all who in “every place” call upon him.

The application of this doctrine is to be regulated by providential occurrences:—“as God offereth opportunity.” When you do not force an occasion by the neglect of more pressing duties ; but when in his providence he fairly puts it in your way, you are not to shun, but thankfully to accept such an “opportunity” of testifying your love to his people by joining with them in the ordinances dispensed among them, or welcoming them to the ordinances dispensed among yourselves.

This seems to be a simple interpretation of

the article before us. Such an one as a man of plain sense and upright heart, without any previous bias, and regarding only the terms in which it is couched, would put upon it. And if such is, indeed, its meaning, there can be no further debate. The churches concerned have decided, by their own public confession, in favor of a communion as catholic and generous as that of the Apostolic and Primitive and Protestant ages: and nothing remains for them but to show, by their example, that they believe their own doctrine—that the profession which they are in the habit of making to God and to man, is a fair exhibition of their principles.

But the point will not be so easily yielded. The respected brethren and venerable fathers with whom this plea remonstrates, make a distinction which they think clears them from the charge of inconsistency, and conciliates their contracted communion with their adherence to the Westminster confession. They distinguish between *church-communion* and the *communion of saints*; or, as they sometimes express it, *Christian communion*. By the first, viz. *church-communion*, they understand communion with a church in her social character, as organized under a particular form of doctrine, government, and worship. By the

second, viz. the *communion of saints* or *Christian communion*, they understand that communion which subsists between Christians as individuals simply, without reference to their *church-connection* at all. And some have even limited this communion, at least in the extent of the confession in the article cited above, to “ministering with our substance, by *communications* of it to supply the necessities of the saints, or, in doing other offices of kindness :” which they suppose, “is fully evident from the scriptures quoted by the venerable assembly at Westminster in support of that article.” The confession is therefore considered not as treating of communion with a church at all, but simply of that brotherly love which should adorn the *private* intercourse of those who are called by the name of Christ.

If the distinction here stated, and *as* stated, be sound, and the interpretation depending upon it genuine, the Westminster confession must doubtless be expunged from our roll of witnesses. But if it should prove to be altogether untenable, and the interpretation founded upon it to be in direct repugnance to the article which it is employed to explain, the refuge of our opposing brethren will be swept away.

In combatting their distinction, which he

holds to be erroneous and hurtful, the author trusts to their candor for acquitting him from the imputation of disrespect. He feels both regret and grief at the necessity imposed on him, of differing from brethren whom he esteems and loves, with whom he has taken, and hopes yet to take "sweet counsel together, and to go to the house of God in company"—from fathers whose shoe's latchet he is scarce worthy to unloose—from churches which have been and are valiant for the truth, and which have distinguished themselves for their fidelity to the testimony of Jesus. It was in their own school, by imbibing their own spirit, that he first learned to "call no man master upon earth;" and he would not pay them so miserable a compliment as to refrain from pointing out their mistake, from an unmanly fear of coming short in the duties of tenderness and respect. The weight of their names, the strength of their habits, and the importance which they attach to the distinction before us, not only justify, but demand a close and full investigation.

It must strike every thinking reader as somewhat extraordinary, that the communion of a church made up of visible saints—of Christians, should not be the communion of saints, nor Christian communion! If the communion which, in public worship, saints hold

with saints, as such, is not "communion of saints" which Christians there hold with Christians, is not "Christian communion," what is it? Do the *Christians* disappear when the *church* assembles? Do the saints become unsainted the moment they sit down at the Lord's table; so that their communion in his body and blood is not the communion of saints, nor at all signified by that expression? To say the least, here is a smack of *Babel*: a strange confusion of human speech! the words certainly do not sound so: nor is it conceivable how such a construction of them should suggest itself to any man's mind, unless he had been reduced to great straits by the pressure of some importunate argument; and could fall upon no other means to extricate himself.

Nor is it less extraordinary, that an instrument prepared, like the confession of faith, with the most cautious deliberation; an instrument remarkable, above all other uninspired compositions, for denseness and perspicuity; for precision and amplitude, should treat professedly of the church of God; of her ministry, her ordinances, her worship—and contain not one syllable on that momentous topic, her communion! Should be explicit and minute on the *private* communion of her members, and silent as death about their *public* fellowship!

That the very framers of this instrument should write letters full of affection to foreign Protestant churches; and should avoid, *studiously* avoid, in their doctrine concerning the catholic church, everything which might inform their correspondents in what light they were to be viewed—whether as fellow-communicants in their Christian privileges, or as a profane refuse of heathen men and publicans! It is absolutely incredible! Yet all this have they done, or neglected to do, if the chapter on the “communion of saints,” is rightly interpreted of *Christian*, to the exclusion of *church-communion*. Such an idea is the more inadmissible, as *all* the churches on both sides of the Atlantic, organized under the Westminster confession, are in the same predicament. There is not one of them whose authentic standard of confession of their faith respecting the church of God, so much as tells the other churches whether they even own them as brethren in the Lord or not! There is something wrong here: and it will be of no small service to the character of the churches of the Westminster confession, to set it right. For this end it will be proper,

1. To ascertain the meaning of the phrase, “*Communion of saints.*”

2. To examine the internal evidence of the

confession itself, coupled with the larger and shorter Catechisms, which are only different forms of the same body of general doctrine.

3. To compare these results with the views of church-communion which are known to have prevailed about the period of which the Westminster Assembly is the most conspicuous incident.

1. For ascertaining the meaning of the phrase "communion of saints," let it be remembered, that at the time of forming the Westminster confession it had been of long use in the church of God: so that it had become familiar as a technical expression; and may, therefore, be taken only in its known and established sense. It passed into the language of the churches from that brief summary of Christian doctrine, called the "Apostles' creed." And as the Westminster divines have annexed that summary to their own more enlarged work, they have taught us that they understood the phrase "communion of saints" in the sense which is affixed to it by the Apostles' creed, and which had been received without contradiction or variance down to their own day.

That little compend was current in the Christian world without the clause "communion of saints," until the end of the fourth,

or beginning of the fifth century. It was gradually, but very cautiously and sparingly, enlarged, as occasion required. And it was an occasion of some deep and universal interest which could avail for introducing a new clause into a formula of such high authority, such boundless adoption, and such extreme brevity. Some point of primary magnitude in the faith of the whole Christian world, and which it was deemed necessary to maintain by a corresponding testimony, must have been assailed—some error calculated to alarm the church “from the one end of heaven even to the other end of heaven,” must have been broached, to cause the insertion of a new member into that miniature body of doctrine which contained the radical faith of all believers, from the rising to the setting sun. What was it? Amidst all the heresies which infested the church for four hundred years, had any one denied the obligation upon Christians in their private capacity to cultivate brotherly kindness?—to intermingle their Christian affections?—to abound in deeds of munificence for each other’s comfort, and for the furtherance of the gospel? Was there any doubt upon this head? And can it be imagined that the public creed, which Christians held sacred, was enlarged for the pur-

pose of asserting what nobody disputed? This will not bear inquiry.

The troubles created by the DONATISTS began near the commencement of the fourth century, and raged with violence for a long series of years. Their schism, as was shown above, consisted precisely in their breaking off from the Catholic church, and refusing to hold communion with churches that were not of their own body. Prior to this event the clause under discussion was not in the Apostles' creed; nor is it to be found in any of the editions of that instrument which have been preserved in writings of an earlier date. The creed simply said, "*I believe in the Holy Catholic church, the forgiveness of sins,*" &c. But *after* the schism of the Donatists, in the time of AUGUSTIN their great antagonist, it appears with "*the communion of saints,*" between these two clauses; and reads, "*I believe in the Holy Catholic church, the COMMUNION OF SAINTS, the forgiveness of sins,*" &c.

The fact is conclusive. We have here the reason and origin of the phrase. It was to maintain the principle of the union and communion of the Catholic church, against the schismatical doctrine and conduct of the Donatists; and so it is paraphrased by its

learned historian and commentator, SIR PETER KING.

“The term *Saints*,” says he, “being explained, it will not be difficult to apprehend the meaning of the other term *communion*; which naturally appears to be this; that there is, and ought to be, a mutual intercourse and society, fellowship, and communion, in all usual and regular ways, between the several respective churches and congregations, of Christians and believers, whereby they declare unto the whole world, that although both necessity and convenience oblige them to assemble in distinct places, and compose different societies, yet, nevertheless, they are all members of one and the same body of which *Jesus Christ* is the head; that they are all guided by the same spirit; communicate in the same institutions, and are governed by the same general rules; so that whatsoever is regularly performed and determined in one congregation, is assented to by all others; and *whosoever is received to communion in one church, is freely admitted into any other.*”

It is, therefore, clear that the phrase “communion of saints,” was, originally, so far from signifying what is now called “*Christian communion*” in opposition to “*church-communion*,” that it signified exactly, or nearly,

the reverse : i. e., it not only comprehended, but strictly and properly expressed, and was put into the creed for the very purpose of expressing, *church-communion*. And although it is couched in terms which fairly embrace the whole fellowship of believers, so as to allow that latitude of exposition which it receives in the Westminster confession ; yet its immediate, primary, and chief, if not sole intention, was to assert the obligation upon *all the churches* of God throughout the world, to commune with each other in the most solemn offices of religion, as his providence should furnish them with opportunities.

In this reigning sense it was handed down to posterity, and understood at the reformation more than eleven centuries after its adoption.

The HELVETIC confession

Explains the church to be “a company of believers called or collected out of the world ;” adding, “I mean a communion of all the saints ; viz., of them who really know the true God, in Christ the Saviour, by his word and spirit, who worship him aright ; finally, who by faith participate in all the benefits which are freely offered to them through Christ. All these are citizens of one city,

living under the same Lord, and the same laws, in the same participation of all good things. For so the Apostle has called them ; (fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God :) Bestowing the appellation of '*saints*' upon believers on earth, "who are sanctified by the blood of the son of God. Eph. 2. 1. Cor. 6. *Of whom is by all means to be understood* that article of the creed, I believe in the Holy Catholic church, **THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.**"

Here the "communion of saints" is pronounced to be the same, as the "holy catholic church ;" so that whatever the communion is, it is *church*-communion. Nor can this be evaded by urging that the confession has restricted the definition of the church to true believers. It has so : but then it is of believers as they *profess* Christ, and are *openly* on his side, forming, throughout the world, one great society organized under his laws. It considers real Christians to be, strictly speaking, the church. But men cannot see into each other's hearts. There is no other way of our knowing who are believers but by the *profession* of their faith with a corresponding behavior. The confession proceeds upon this fundamental rule of society, civil and sacred, that, before the tribunal of human judgment,

a man *is* what he *appears* to be. It speaks, therefore, of the church of believers, as indicated by their visible profession, walk, and order, in the gospel. In no other way can she be known as a *militant* church—in no other way can tares be mixed with her wheat—in no other way can she have “a great many *particular* churches upon earth, all referrible to the true Catholic church”—in no other way could she “have her *institutions*, and be regulated in one form among the Patriarchs before the law—in another, by the law under Moses—and in a third, by Christ through the gospel;” all of which this same article most fully maintains.

To the same purport, at a still earlier period, speaks

The CONFESSIO*N* of BASIL :

“We believe in the holy Christian church, i. e. the *communion of saints* ; the congregation of the faithful in spirit, which is holy, and the spouse of Christ. In which all those are citizens who confess that JESUS is the CHRIST, the lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world ; and who demonstrate that faith of theirs by works of love.”

The STRASBURG CONFESSION :

“Since the Saviour reigns truly, in these,” (the children of God) “they are properly called ‘his church,’ and, ‘*the COMMUNION,*’ i. e. the SOCIETY of saints, as the term ‘church’ is explained in the Apostles’ creed.”

The BOHEMIC CONFESSION :

“We are most thoroughly persuaded, by clear indications from the word of God, that our ministers who do not overleap the bounds of evangelical doctrine, are addicted to no heresies; but are true ministers of Christ, and in Christ’s stead; and are to be obeyed, by the commandment of truth itself. Wherefore it were most unlawful to withhold the *communion of saints* with them; especially as we are bound thereto by this very article of the Apostles’ creed; *I believe in the holy Catholic church, the communion of saints.*”

CALVIN,

Who is more remarkable for nothing than for his decision—who never trims, nor shuffles, nor thinks by halves, has founded his whole doctrine of *church-communion* upon this very article. And in his exposition of the words “communion of saints” thus expresses himself.

“This article of the creed has also some re-

spect to the external church; that every one of us may keep himself in brotherly concord with all the children of God; may yield to the church her just authority; in a word, may conduct himself as a sheep of the flock. And, therefore, there is added, the COMMUNION OF SAINTS—because it excellently expresses the quality of the *church*: as if it had been said, the saints are gathered into the fellowship of Christ upon this condition, that they mutually communicate to each other all the good things which God bestows upon them. By which, however, the diversity of his favors is not destroyed; as we know that the gifts of the Spirit are variously distributed; nor is that political order plucked up, by which every one is at liberty to possess his own wealth in his private right; as it is necessary, for the sake of preserving peace among men, that the control of property should be distinct and independent. But there is asserted such a community as *Luke* describes, that *the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul*; and *Paul*, when he exhorts the *Ephesians* to be *one body and one spirit, as they are called in one hope*. For it cannot be, if they are truly persuaded that God is their common father, and Christ their common head, but that joined to-

gether in brotherly love, they will most freely interchange their privileges.”

And, to put the matter beyond all question, when he is showing that “we are in no manner to depart from the communion of saints,” he “refutes the errors of the *Novatians*, the *Anabapists* and other *schismatical* and *idle-minded* men of the same stamp ;” whose schism we know, consisted precisely in their refusing to hold communion with other churches than their own. This Calvin reprobates as a violation of the “communion of saints ;” and considering the unparalleled acceptance of his work with the reformed churches, his interpretation must be regarded as their common judgment. Other reformers speak in the same strain.

From the days of Calvin and the Reformation, to the Westminster Assembly in 1643, no alteration, on this point, appears to have occurred in the sense of the religious world. Take two or three proofs.

The 133d psalm beginning, *Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity !* has been applied, time immemorial, to the harmony and love of Christians in their *church-communion*. It is so at the present day ; and in several churches, *particularly in those which most strenuously support the*

distinction I am combatting, is sung at the conclusion of Presbyterial and Synodical meetings. Now the Translators of the Bible have marked the contents of this psalm as displaying “*the benefits of the COMMUNION OF SAINTS.*” Whether the application is correct or incorrect, makes no difference in the argument. For as it was current in the Christian world, the Translators, by their designation of the psalm, have shown that, in their eyes, “church-communion,” and “communion of saints,” mean the same thing. They were forty-seven of the most learned Divines in England; and can hardly be supposed to have mistaken the public sense of an expression so habitually repeated in the church service. They performed their work between 1606 and 1611.

Dr. JOHN DAVENANT, one of the English Divines at the Synod of *Dordt*, afterwards bishop of *Salisbury*, in a letter written about 1634, to JOHN DURÆUS, a Scotsman, celebrated for his endeavors to unite the Protestant churches, thus expresses himself. “The church of Rome alone has gone to such a high pitch of pride and madness as to thrust out from the “*communion of saints*,” and devote to hell, all the *churches* which refuse submission to the anti-christian yoke of absolute and blind obedience.”

The most reverend and learned JAMES USHER, afterwards archbishop of *Armagh*, and one of the original members of the Westminster Assembly, preached a sacramental sermon in 1620, before the House of Commons, from 1 Cor. x. 17. *We being many, are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.* In this sermon, he observes, “the Apostle maketh our partaking of the Lord’s table to be a testimony not only of the union and communion which we have betwixt ourselves and with our Head, (which he doth in the express words which I have read,) but also of our disunion and separation from all idolatrous worship.

“The effect, therefore, of that which St. *Paul* in express terms here delivereth, is the *communion of saints*; which consisteth of two parts, the fellowship which they have with the *Body*, laid down in the beginning; and the fellowship which they have with the *Head*, laid down in the end of the verse.” In expounding the first part, he not only mentions explicitly “both our baptism and our drinking of the Lord’s cup,” as belonging to the communion of saints, but handles the sin of schism, “or making a rent in the church of God,” as a breach of this communion; and he exhorts Christians to “remember that as oft as

we come unto the Lord's table, so oft do we enter into new bonds of peace, and tie ourselves with firmer knots of love together: this blessed communion being a sacred seal not only of the union which we have with our Head by *faith*; but also of our conjunction with the other members of the body, (the body of Christ,) by *love*."

RICHARD BAXTER, a holy man of God, of merited celebrity in the church, and contemporary with the Westminster assembly, has, in his treatise entitled *A Christian Directory*, a long chapter on the nature of church union and communion, which is thus headed, "*Directions for the union AND COMMUNION of SAINTS; and the avoiding unpeaceableness and SCHISM.*" His 6th direction is, "Make nothing necessary to the *unity of the church, or the COMMUNION OF CHRISTIANS*, which God hath not made necessary, or directed you to make so." Here "church-communion," "communion of saints," and "communion of Christians," are evidently used by Mr. BAXTER as convertible terms; and it is equally evident that in using them thus indifferently, the one for the other, he speaks the language of the church in his day.

Furthermore. The Westminster confession of faith was substantially adopted by the

churches of Connecticut assembled, by delegation, at *Saybrook*, September 9th, 1708. Under the very head, viz., *the communion of saints*, they have introduced the section we are now considering with the following variation : “ which communion, *though especially to be exercised by them in the relations wherein they stand, whether in families or CHURCHES*, yet, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.” Note, this “ communion” is to be exercised by “ saints” in their *church-capacity* ; it is, therefore, *church-communion*.

The very same sense continued to be affixed to it long after, and that in the church of *Scotland* ; from which all the parties embarked in this part of the discussion are derived. The great and good THOMAS BOSTON, who died in 1732, preached several sermons from 1 Cor. x. 17, which he afterwards reduced into a tract, entitled, “ *The unity of the body of Christ, and the duty the members owe one to another.*” His text is the same with USHER’s, quoted above, and so is his general mode of treating it, only he is much more minute and ample than the Irish prelate.

The broad doctrinal proposition which he developes and applies is this ;

“DOCT. *There is a COMMUNION OF SAINTS among themselves, as being conjoined into one mystical body of Christ declared and avouched by PARTAKERS OF THE SACRAMENTS, especially that of the Lord’s supper, every one for themselves.*” And again, he says that “the sacraments are the external bond of this *communion.*” But sacramental communion is “church-communion; therefore, “church-communion” is “the communion of saints.”

Nay, so firmly was this sense fixed in the church, that the excellent JOHN BROWN, of *Haddington*, even after he had been accustomed to the distinction both in theory and practice, (being, according to his worthy son and biographer, “*strict in what is called church-communion;*” and “as to what is named the *communion of saints*, as distinguished from it, *liberal,*”) even JOHN BROWN himself could not altogether rid himself of the received interpretation, but, forgetting the new distinction, thus expressed himself concerning the *Seceders*, who left their ministers in the established church of Scotland: “In vain you told them that their withdrawalment was a breaking up of the *communion of saints.*” And again, “They,” the seceders, “challenged you to prove that Luther and Calvin’s obedience to that command,” the command of God, to leave the church of

Rome, “amounted to a breaking up of the *communion of saints*.” But the communion from which Luther and Calvin withdrew was certainly *church-communion*; therefore, Mr. Brown himself being judge, “*church-communion*” is “communion of saints.” And so he has inadvertently exploded his own distinction upon which he and his brethren were acting; and upon which the secession-churches, their American descendants, and some others have, for the most part, continued to act to this hour. Let us return.

It has now been proved that the principal, the reigning idea of the term “communion of saints,” from its introduction into the Apostles’ creed, about the fifth century, through the whole of the Reformation from Popery, and of the subsequent period, down to the sitting of the Assembly at Westminster, was precisely that of “church-communion.” Consequently the chapter which, in their confession, they have themselves entitled “*Of Communion of Saints*,” whatever else it may include, must be interpreted, according to the known and undisputed sense of the phrase, as treating expressly and officially of *Church-communion*.

2. Let us in the next place see what light is shed on this subject by the confession itself:

so that the Westminster fathers may be their own expositors:

In the *Larger Catechism*, which is nothing but the confession reduced to question and answer, the “communion of saints” is said to be one of the “special privileges of the **VISIBLE CHURCH.**” But a privilege which belongs and is peculiar to her as the *visible church*, belongs and is peculiar to her in her *church-capacity*. This is so perfectly plain as to be little more than a tautology. And the communion which she enjoys in her church-capacity is, and can be, nothing else than *church-communion*. Therefore, the confession itself being judge, *church-communion* is the communion of saints.

Again: The “holy fellowship and communion,” which “saints by profession are bound to maintain,” is distributed into three parts—It is to be maintained

- (1.) “In the worship of God.”
- (2.) “In other spiritual services.”
- (3.) “In relieving each other in outward things.”

In regard to the first of these, let the Confession itself explain what is meant by “the worship of God.”

“The reading of the scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the word, in obedience unto God,

with understanding, faith, and reverence; singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also the *due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments* instituted by Christ; are *all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God.*”

For “worship of God,” in the 26th chapter, substitute the *description* of that worship in the 25th; and we have the following result—

“Saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the public preaching and hearing of the word—in the praises of God—and in the sacraments instituted by Christ.

If this is not “church-communion,” what is? Yet this, according to our “good confession,” belongs to the “communion of saints” by profession. Whatever else belongs to it, is referrible to the second or third of the particulars enumerated above, which, either one or both, comprehends all that has been or can be assigned to the “communion of saints,” by those who oppose it to “church-communion.”

A word more. The “communion of saints, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended,” says the confession, “to all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.”

It only remains

3. To compare the sense thus ascertained

of the phrase “communion of saints,” and of the chapter under that title in the Westminster confession of faith, with the views of church-communion which are known to have prevailed at and about the time when it was drawn up. Take such facts as the following.

There had been previously published, by the joint authority of the French and Dutch churches, a harmony of the Reformed confessions, digested under distinct heads: So that whatever is contained in the several confessions on any one subject was gathered into one chapter of the “harmony.” And it was compiled for the very end of showing to the world the concord of Protestants, not excepting the Lutherans, in all matters which ought to form the bond of union and communion; and thus to repel the reproach of the Papists that they were separated from each other as much as from Rome. The preface concludes with the following apostrophe.

“Ye, therefore, most gracious Kings, Dukes, Earls, Marquises, most famous Barons and noble Lords; ye cities and commonwealths; ye most wise Pastors, Doctors, and to be short, all Christian People *professing the truth of the Gospel*, be present in souls and bodies, suffer not the poison of discord to spread any farther: but kill this hurtful serpent; and receive with

a Christian mind, as is meet, and as is offered unto you, this most sure token and earnest of the everlasting friendship of the *French* and *Belgian* churches with you, offered to you in the face of the whole world; that we, being by a friendly league coupled together in Christ, may vanquish all Antichrists, and may sing that Hymn to the Lord our God, *Behold ! how good and joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity !*"

This book was translated into English and published in *London*, 1643, during the sitting of the Westminster Assembly; and not only so, but "allowed by publique authoritie." This "publique authoritie," without which no book might be printed, was lodged, by parliament, in June, 1643, for the department of Theology, in the hands of twelve divines, *seven of whom were members of the Assembly*. Now it is hardly possible that such a committee should have licensed a book containing anything materially at variance with an important Christian doctrine as received by themselves, when they formed part of a body of men who were about to assert that very doctrine as so received; and concerning which there does not appear to have been any difference among them.

The Assembly itself addressed an official

letter, of November 30th, 1643, “To the **BELGIC, FRENCH, HELVETIAN**, and other Reformed churches;” whom they style “*Right Reverend and dearly beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ.*” “The inscription was “*To the Reverend and learned pastors and elders of the classes and churches of ZEALAND, our much honored brethren.*” This letter was subscribed not only by the Prolocutor, Assessors, and Scribes of the Assembly, but by all the commissioners from the church of Scotland; among whom were the ever famous and venerable **SAMUEL RUTHERFORD**, and **GEORGE GILLESPIE**. The letter is full of affection, and evinces peculiar anxiety for the good opinion, sympathy, and prayers of those churches. It states, in so many words, that the object of the Assembly was “to commend such a platform to our *Zerubbabels*” (the political governors) “as may be *most agreeable to God’s sacred word*, **NEAREST IN CONFORMITY TO THE BEST REFORMED CHURCHES**, and to *establish* unity among ourselves.”

It is worthy of remark, that this letter, in its general address, specifies the *Belgic, French*, and *Helvetian* churches. Now these are the very churches which signalized themselves on the side of Catholic communion. The efforts of the *French* church were formerly noticed—the dispositions of the *Belgic* church in unison

with the *French* were sufficiently manifested by the preface to the “Harmony” just quoted: And the *Helvetic* church had declared she should be guilty of a NEFARIOUS SCHISM, should she withdraw from communion with other churches of the Reformation. Yet these are the very churches to which the Westminster Assembly wished most nearly to conform the church in England: and in that wish they were one with the Scottish Commissioners. What shall we say to such a fact? Shall we say that the churches of *England* and *Scotland*, through the medium of their representatives at Westminster, trifled with the foreign churches! That they would not hold communion with those to whom they aimed at the “NEAREST conformity?” That they approached these churches with a lie in their mouth? and were guilty of such cursed hypocrisy, as to hail them as their “*dearly beloved—their much honored brethren in our Lord Jesus Christ,*” while at the very same moment they did not account their ministers to be worthy of appearing in their pulpits, nor their people of a seat with themselves at the table of the Lord? If not: if we recoil with horror from such an imputation, the alternative is clear; they embraced, and were ready to exemplify, equally with the *Dutch, French, and Swiss* churches,

the most liberal doctrine of communion with all, of every name, “who held the HEAD.”

That such was then the true state of principle on the subject of communion—That it was so intended to be expressed, and was so understood when expressed, in the confession—that like the LUTHERS, and CALVINS, the MELANCTHONS, and BUCERS, and MARTYRS; like the *Dutch, French, and Swiss* churches, the Westminster Assembly, and the evangelical interest generally, was desirous of bottoming the communion of the church upon the broad foundation of the common faith, without regard to minor differences, is one of the most incontestible facts in ecclesiastical story. Besides the proofs which have already been produced, let the following, out of a multitude, suffice.

(1.) The *English* ANABAPTISTS, in 1644, while the Westminster Assembly was sitting, published their confession of faith, which was strictly Calvinistical, excepting in the article of baptism; but on account of that difference they declined communion with the other reformed churches—a narrowness which greatly displeased and scandalized their Christian neighbors. For, according to NEAL, “The people of this persuasion were *more exposed to the public resentments*, because they would hold

communion with none but such as had been *dipped*."

Two things are settled by this testimony.

First, That such sectarian communion was contrary to the feelings and habits of the Calvinistic churches at that time, or it would not have drawn upon the Anabaptists "the public resentments." Thence,

Secondly, That in the judgment of these churches, neither difference in the government of the church, (the Anabaptists being Independents,) nor different views of the subjects and mode of baptism, are valid reasons for breaking up communion: and therefore that to refuse communion on their account is a worse violation of the law of Christ, than an error in either or in both.

(2.) In 1654, five years after the termination of the Assembly, the provincial Synod of *London* published a book, entitled *Jus Divinum Ministerii Evangelici*; or, *The Divine Right of the Gospel Ministry*. The ministerial portion of a committee of that Synod at its first meeting, in 1647, were all members of the Westminster Assembly. One of them, Mr. JEREMIAH WHITAKER, had a chief hand in composing their work. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude, that they not only knew, but expressed, the prevailing sentiments of the

Westminster divines. In their preface, speaking of the different sorts of men whom they had to deal with, they say, to use their own words,

“5. A fifth sort are our Reverend brethren of *New and Old England* of the CONGREGATIONAL WAY, who hold our churches to be true churches, and our ministers true ministers, though they differ from us in some lesser things. We have been necessitated to fall upon some things wherein they and we disagree, and have represented the reasons of our dissent. But yet we here profess, That this disagreement shall not hinder us from any Christian accord with them in affection: That we can willingly write upon our study-doors that motto which Mr. JEREMIAH BURROUGHES (who, a little before his death, did ambitiously endeavor after union amongst brethren, as some of us can testify) persuades all scholars unto,

“*Opinionum varietas, et opinantium unitas non sunt ἀνύστατα.*”

And that we shall be willing to entertain any sincere motion (as we have also formerly declared in our printed vindication) that shall further a happy accommodation between us.

“6. The last sort are the moderate, godly episcopal men, that hold ordination by presby-

ters to be lawful and valid ; that a bishop and a presbyter are one and the same order of ministry—that are orthodox in doctrinal truths ; and yet hold, that the government of the church by a perpetual moderator is most agreeable to scripture-pattern.

“ Though herein we differ from them, yet we are *far from thinking that this difference should hinder a happy union between them and us.* Nay, we crave leave to profess to the world, that it will never, as we humbly conceive, be well with ENGLAND, *till there be an union endeavored and effected between all those that are orthodox in doctrine, though differing among themselves in some circumstances about church-government.*

“ Memorable is the story of Bishop RIDLEY and Bishop HOOPER, two famous Martyrs, who, when they were out of prison, disagreed about certain ceremonial garments : but when they were put into prison they quickly and easily agreed together. *Adversity united them whom prosperity divided.*”

(3.) The ministers and messengers of above one hundred congregational churches ; among them that prince of modern divines, JOHN OWEN, and that very distinguished minister of Christ, JOHN HOWE, met, at the *Savoy*, October 12, 1653 ; and adopted substantially the doctrines of the Westminster confession ;

among the rest, the chapter on the “communion of saints.” Now as this has been proved to comprehend “church-communion,” it would never have received the approbation of a Synod of congregationalists if it had been supposed not to leave the question about external order among the matters of forbearance. Especially by a Synod who agreed, “that churches consisting of persons sound in the faith, and of good conversation, ought not to refuse communion with each other, *though they walk not in all things according to the same rule of church-order*; and if they judge other churches to be true churches, though less pure, they may receive to occasional communion such members of those churches as are credibly testified to be godly, and to live without offence.”

This agreement is the more worthy of notice on account of the influence which DR. OWEN is conceded to have possessed in the Synod. For there has not been, and cannot be a more strenuous advocate for enlarged communion than was that champion of the truth of JESUS, that terror and torment of its vital corrupters—the Socinians. He maintains, that “such a *communion of churches* is to be inquired after, as from which no true church of Christ *is, or can be*, excluded; in whose

actual exercise they may and ought all to live ; and whereby the general end of all churches in the edification of the Catholic church, may be attained. This is the true and only *Catholicism* of the church, which whoever departs from, or substitutes anything else in the room of it, under that name, destroys its whole nature, and disturbs the whole *ecclesiastical harmony* that is of Christ's institution.

“However, therefore, we plead for the *rights of particular churches*, yet our real controversy with most of the world is for the being, union, and communion of the *church Catholic*, which are variously perverted by many, separating it into parties, and confining it to rules, measures, and canons of their own finding out and establishment.”

Again. “Had the Presbyterian government been settled, at the King's,” (CHARLES the II.) “restoration, by the encouragement and protection of the practice of it, without a *rigorous imposition* of every thing supposed by any to belong thereunto, or a mixture of human constitutions ; if there had any appearance of a *schism* or *separation* continued between the parties, I do judge they would have been both to blame. For as it cannot be expected that all churches and all persons in them should agree in all principles and

practices belonging unto church-order, nor was it so in the days of the Apostles, nor ever since, among any true churches of Christ: so all the *fundamental principles* of church-communion would have been so fixed and agreed upon between them, and all offences in worship so removed, as that it would have been a matter of no great *art* absolutely to unite them, or to maintain a firm communion among them, no more than in the days of the Apostles and the primitive times, in reference to the differences that were among churches in those days. For they allowed *distinct communion* upon distinct apprehensions of things belonging unto church-order or worship, all ‘keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’ If it shall be asked, then, why they did not formerly agree in the Assembly? I answer (1.) I was none of them, and cannot tell. (2.) They did agree, in my judgment, well enough; if they could have thought so: and, farther, I am not concerned in the difference.”

When Dr. OWEN admits that the Presbyterians and Independents “did not agree in the Assembly;” he means that they did not agree in a scheme of *public ecclesiastical union*.

That such was the real state of the case; that churches were kept asunder in England from mere party feeling, is roundly averred

by one of their noblest men, Mr. JOHN HOWE. "I cannot forget," says he, "that sometime discoursing with some very noted persons about the business of union among Christians, it hath been freely granted me, that there was not so much as a principle left (among those the discourse had reference to) upon which to disagree; and yet the same fixed aversion to *union* continued as before; as a plain proof they were not *principles*, but *ends* we were to differ for."

Let us, for a moment hear this dignified advocate of Catholic fellowship plead its cause in his own nervous language.

"The more *truly Catholic* the communion of Christians is, it is the more *truly Christian*."

"Nor is it mere *Peace* that is to be aimed at, but *free, mutual, Christian-communion* with such as do all *hold the Head Christ* :

"As peace between nations infers commerce; so among Christian churches, it ought to infer a fellowship in acts of worship. I wish there were no cause to say this is declined when no pretence is left against it but false accusation; none but what must be supported by lying and calumny. Too many are busy at inventing of that which is no where to be found, that exists not in the nature of things, that they may have a color for con-

tinued distance. And is not this to fly in the face of the authority under which we live, i. e. the ruling power of the kingdom of Christ, the Prince of Peace? 'Tis strange they are not ashamed to be called Christians; that they do not discard and abandon the name, that can allow themselves in such things! And 'tis here to be noted, that 'tis quite another thing, what is in itself *true* or *false*, *right* or *wrong*; and what is to be a *measure* or *boundary* of *Christian-communion*. Are we yet to learn, that Christian-communion is not amongst men that are perfect: but that are laboring under manifold imperfections, both in knowledge and holiness! And whatsoever mistake in judgment or obliquity in practice can consist with *holding the Head*, ought to consist also with being of the same Christian-communion; not the same *locally*, which is impossible; but the same occasionally, as any providence invites, at this or that time; and mentally, in heart and spirit, at all times. And to such peace (and consequently communion) we are *all called, in one body*, Col. iii. 15. We are expressly required to *receive one another*, (which cannot but mean into each others communion,) and *not to doubtful disputations*, Rom. xiv. 1. If any be thought to be weak, and thereupon to differ from us in some

or other sentiments, if the difference consists with *holding the Head*, they are not, because they are weak, to be refused communion, but received; and received, *because the Lord has received them*, ver. 3. All that we should think Christ has received into his communion, we ought to receive into ours, Rom. xv. 7. Scriptures are so express to this purpose, that nothing can be more.

“And indeed, to make new boundaries of Christian-communion, is to make a new Christianity, and a *New Gospel*, and new rules of Christ’s kingdom; and by which to distinguish subjects and rebels, and in effect to dethrone him, to rival him in his highest prerogative, viz. the establishing the terms of life and death for men living under his Gospel: It is to confine salvation, in the means of it, to such or such a party, such a church, arbitrarily distinguished from the rest of Christians; as if the privileges of his kingdom belonged to a party only; and that, for instance, the Lord’s Table were to lose its name, and be no longer so called, but the table of this or that church, constituted by *rules of their own devising*. For if it be the Lord’s Table, they are to keep it free, to be approached upon the Lord’s terms, and not their own. In the meantime, what higher invasion can there be of Christ’s rights?

and since the Christian church became so overwise above what is written, in framing new doctrines and rules of worship, how miserably it hath languished, and been torn in pieces, they cannot be ignorant who have read anything of the history of it."

(4.) Such were the prevailing sentiments among the INDEPENDENTS. Let us now turn again to the PRESBYTERIANS; and see how the communion of the church appears under the irradiation of their "burning and shining lights."

Dr. MANTON protests against "the breaking off church-fellowship and communion, and making rents in the body of Christ because of difference of opinion in smaller matters, when we agree in the more weighty things. We are to *walk together as far as we are agreed*. *Phil.* iii. 16. and *externals* wherein we differ, laying far from *the heart of religion*, are nothing to *faith* and the *new creature*, wherein we agree. *Gal.* v. 6. and vi. 15. The most weight should be pitched upon the *fundamentals* and *essentials* of religion; and where there is an agreement in these, private differences in *smaller matters* should not make us break off from one another."

What these "smaller matters" are, which, according to this admirable divine, should be no impediment to church-communion, his own

words indicate ; they are all things which cannot be ranked among the *essentials* of Christianity ; whether they be matters of discipline or worship, of government or doctrine. That his language is not stretched, by this interpretation, beyond its true meaning, he has himself decided. “The *only lawful* grounds of separation,” says he, “are *three*. 1. Intolerable persecution. 2. Damnable heresy. 3. Gross idolatry.” Everything else is tolerable, and to be tolerated rather than burst the bands of church-fellowship.

MR RICHARD VINES, a member of the Assembly, and “a very learned and excellent divine,” in his “*Treatise of the Sacraments of the Lord’s Supper*,” has a chapter upon the following question, “*Whether a godly man lawfully may or ought to stand as a member of, and hold communion in the ordinances of God with, such a congregation as is mixt, as they call it ; that is, where men visibly scandalous in life and conversation are mingled with the good in the participation and use of divine ordinances ? Or whether this mixture of heterogeneousals do not pollute the ordinances and the communion to the godly, so as they are concerned to separate from such communion ?*”

The chapter is too long to be inserted entire : a specimen shall suffice.

“The church may be corrupted many ways in doctrine, ordinances, worship; and this I account the worst, because it is the corruption of the best, as the corruption of blood that runs through all the body, the poisoning of springs and rivers that run through a nation, is worse than a sore finger in the body, or a field of thistles in the nation. And there are degrees of this corruption, the doctrine in some remote points, *hay and stubble upon the foundation*; the worship in some rituals or rites of men’s invention or custom. How many Scripture churches do ye find thus corrupted, and yet no separation of Christ from the Jewish church, nor any command to the godly of *Corinth*, (in the provinces of *Galatia*,) or those of *Asia*, in the *Revelation*; I must in such case *avoid the corruption, hold the communion: hear them in Moses’ chair, and yet beware of their leaven*. But if corruptions invade the fundamentals, the foundation of doctrine is destroyed, the worship is become idolatrous, the leprosy is gotten into the walls and substance of the house: and which is above all, if the church impose such laws of their communion, as there is necessity of doing or approving things unlawful, or I am ruined or undone, then must I either break with God or men, and in that case, *come out of Babylon*. The

churches of Protestants so separated from them of Rome; it was a necessary and just separation, the laws of their communion were ruinous to the soul, if we held it; to the body and life, if we held it not.

In sum then, and in conclusion of this part about doctrine and worship, which is but upon the by to the question. If a corrupt church, as *Israel* was, have their ordinances according to the pattern in the Mount: if it may be said, as Peter to Christ, *John* vi. 68. when some disciples separated themselves. *Thou hast the words of eternal life*; if, as Christ said in matters of worship, *John* iv. *Salvation is of the Jews*; then, as he said, *Whither shall we go?* Why do we separate? And yet I would not be mistaken by the simplest man, as if I accounted it separation, if a Christian hear a sermon, or receive the sacrament in another congregation. For he that takes a meal at another table, does not thereby separate from his own house. Or if a Christian, at liberty to dispose his dwelling, shall remove and sit down under more fruitful ordinances; I account not this secession a separation, no more than if being sickly, and having not health in the city, he remove his seat into the country for purer air, because in so doing he removes from the city, but renounces not his freedom therein; nor dis-

claims, in like proportion, the communion of the church.”

RICHARD BAXTER thus writes: “I do not lay so great a stress upon the external modes and forms of worship as many young professors do. I have suspected myself, as perhaps the reader may do, that this is from a cooling and declining from my former zeal, (though the truth is, I never much complied with men of that mind.) But I find that *Judgment* and *Charity* are the causes of it, as far as I am able to discover. I cannot be so *narrow* in my principles of church-communion as many are; that are so much for a liturgy, or so much against it, so much for ceremonies, or so much against them, that they can hold communion with no church that is not of their mind and way. If I were among the Greeks, the Lutherans, the Independents; yea, the Anabaptists, (that own no heresy, nor set themselves against charity and peace,) I would hold sometimes occasional communion with them as Christians, (if they will give me leave, without forcing me to any sinful subscription or action :) though my most *usual* communion should be with that society which I thought most agreeable to the word of God, if I were free to choose. I cannot be of their opinion that think God will not accept him that prayeth by

the common prayer book, and that such forms are a self-invented worship which God rejecteth: Nor yet can I be of their mind that say the like of extemporary prayers." Admirable principles, admirably expressed! Worthy of the man whom, bishop WILKINS being judge, it was honor enough for one age to produce: and who could say, as "he said to a friend, *I can as willingly be a martyr for LOVE, as for any article of the creed.*"

TO Mr. BAXTER let us add Dr. WILLIAM BATES, to whom we are indebted for the two preceding anecdotes. The "silver Bates," as he is styled by Mr. HERVEY; and one of the ministers appointed to manage, on the part of the Presbyterians, the conference held at the *Savoy*, by order of CHARLES II., in 1661, between them and a number of Episcopal divines on the part of the established church.

"He was," says Mr. HOWE, "for *entire union* of all *visible Christians*, (or *saints*, or *believers*, which in Scripture are equivalent terms,) meaning by *Christianity* what is essential thereto, whether *doctrinal*, or *practical*; as by *Humanity* we mean what is essential to man, severing accidents, as being not of the essence; and by *visibility*, the *probable appearance* thereof: and for free communion of all such, of whatsoever persuasion, in *extra* essen-

tial matters, *if they pleased*. And this design he vigorously pursued as long as there was any hope ; desisting when it appeared hopeless, and resolving to wait till God should give a Spirit suitable hereto ; from an apprehension that when principles on all hands were so easily accommodable, and yet that there was with too many a remaining insuperable reluctance to the *thing itself*, God must work the cure, and not man. Accounting also, in the meantime, that notwithstanding misrepresentations, it was better to cast a mantle over the failings of brethren, than be concerned to detect and expose them. Knowing that if we be principally solicitous for the *name of God*, he will in his own way and time take care of *ours*. And in this sentiment he was not alone.”

The foregoing are only a sample. We must leave individuals, who are by far too numerous to quote within reasonable bounds, and proceed to a few facts which ascertain the *collective* judgment and practice of numbers of those wise and holy men who about that time were the glory of *England*.

(5.) It will surprise most of the good people who adhere to the Westminster Confession, (and well they may,) as a rare, and perhaps unequalled exhibition of sound scriptural doctrine, that the very Assembly who prepared it

were so far from refusing communion on account of those things which now divide many precious Christians and Christian churches, that notwithstanding all their convictions and complaints of the abuses and corruptions in the discipline, worship, and government of the established church, they nevertheless remained steadily in her fellowship; nor did they leave it until they were cast out by that cruel act for conformity which would not allow them to mourn and submit, but required them also to approve. Then they arrived at the extreme limit of forbearance. Communion with the Episcopal church was not worth the sacrifice of truth and honesty: When the terms of conformity became sinful, there was no room for hesitation—they forsook all to follow Christ. But before the arrival of so afflicting a crisis, they endured what they disliked for the sake of what they loved—they bore with many and great defects for the preservation of unity; and while they had the substance of Christianity unencumbered with criminal conditions, they accounted the rupture of communion a worse evil than the scandals against which they remonstrated. “Remember,” says Mr. BAXTER, when the spirit of schism began to spread its venom among the Presbyterian and Independent Dissenters, “Remember, that

for the *Common Prayer*, and *Ceremonies*, and *Prelacy*, multitudes of worthy, holy men, conformed to them heretofore, from whom you would not have separated ; such as Dr. PRESTON, Dr. SIBBS, Dr. TAYLOR, Dr. STAUGHTON, Mr. GATAKER, and *most, by far, of the late Synod at Westminster.*” “When they went thither, they were,” he says, “ALL CONFORMISTS, save about eight or nine, and the Scots commissioners.”

Twelve years after the Assembly, viz. in 1660, “the well-meaning *Presbyterians*,” as NEAL calls them ; i. e. the Presbyterians of the most moderate and Catholic spirit—offered, as a plan of accommodation with the Episcopalians, “Archbishop USHER’s model of primitive Episcopacy :” the chief feature of which is, that, without destroying the distinctive titles of arch-bishop, bishop, and presbyter, as known in England, they might be conjoined in the *government* of the church ; a bishop being *perpetual president* in the ecclesiastical assemblies made up of Presbyters.

They offered that “the *surplice*, the *cross in baptism*, and *kneeling* at the communion, should be left indifferent.”

“They were content to set aside the *Assembly’s confession*, and let the articles of the church of England take place “with some few

amendments.” In pursuance of this scheme, about the middle of June, Mr. CALAMY, Dr. REYNOLDS, Mr. ASH, Mr. BAXTER, Dr. WALLIS, Dr. MANTON, and Dr. SPURSTOW, waited upon the king, being introduced by the Earl of *Manchester*, to crave his majesty’s interposition for reconciling the differences in the church, that the people might not be deprived of their faithful pastors.”

CHARLES received them very affably; and soon after issued a “declaration” which though not equal to their just expectations, was yet so favorable as to draw from the *Presbyterians* about *London*, an address of *thanks* to his majesty, which was “signed by *Samuel Clark, William Cooper, Thomas Case,* Jo. Rawlinson, Jo. Sheffield, Thomas Gouge, Gab. Sanger, El. Pledger, Matthew Pool, Jo. Gibbon,* William Whitaker, Thomas Jacomb, Thomas Lye, John Jackson,* John Meriton, William Bates*, with many others.” The three marked * were members of the Assembly.

That the disposition to a compromise with the church of *England*, conceding some pretty important points to her Episcopal predilections, and stipulating merely for toleration and forbearance on other matters of external order, did not flow from transient impressions, but from mature conviction and settled judgment,

is proved by subsequent events. Fourteen years afterwards, i. e. in 1675, when the rigors of the establishment on the one side, and the sufferings of the ejected ministers and their people on the other, might be supposed to have produced mutual repugnance and exasperation, Mr. BAXTER drew up, at the request of a large portion of the puritan interest, a "Profession of Religion," containing, among other things, the following clause: "I do hold that the book of *Common Prayer*, and of *Bishops, Priests, and Deacons*, containeth in it nothing so disagreeable to the word of God, as maketh it unlawful to live in the peaceable communion of the church that useth it." Which accords entirely with the spirit of the *English* divines in the Assembly, who were generally against abjuring Episcopacy as simply unlawful. Consequently, it never could have been their intention to subject the communion of the church to such rigorous limitations as have since been adopted under the sanction of their name.

These professions were not idle words. Not only did the Puritans in general commune with each other, as they had opportunity, but also, at least to a great extent, with the church of England—with their *brethren who hated them, and cast them out, for their master's*

name's sake; and who said, as some others have said in the act of beating their fellow servants, "*Let the Lord be glorified!*" Take, as examples, the following eminent divines.

SAMUEL CLARK, father of the author of "*Annotations on the Bible*," unable to subscribe the act of uniformity, "laid aside his ministry, and attended the church of England both as a hearer and a communicant. For, as he himself says, he durst not separate from it; nor was he satisfied about *gathering a private church out of a true church*, which he judged the Church of England to be."

ZACHARY CROFTON, a warm advocate for the *solemn league and covenant*, was sent a prisoner to the Tower for his non-conformity; and while there, "he attended the chapel service, being against separation from the parish churches, though he himself (as a minister) could not use the common prayer or the ceremonies." And when thus suffering for the truth's sake, by the hand of the establishment, he actually wrote, in the Tower, a tract entitled, "*Reformation not Separation; a Plea for Communion with the Church*," &c.

HENRY JESSEY, after his ejection, turned Baptist; "and it proved no small honor and advantage to the *Baptists* to have such a man among them. But notwithstanding his differ-

ing from his brethren in this, or any other point, he maintained the same Christian love and charity to all saints as before, not only as to friendly conversation, but also in regard to *church-communion*: and took great pains to promote the same Catholic spirit among others."

Dr. THOMAS GOUGE, of whom it has been said by a distinguished prelate, that "all things considered, there have not, since the primitive times of Christianity, been many among the sons of men to whom that glorious character of the Son of God might be better applied, 'that he went about doing good;' although persecuted for preaching, constantly attended the parish churches, and communicated there."

RICHARD WAVEL, "was of congregational principles, but of extensive charity. It was his principle and constant practice *to receive all whom Christ had received, without any debate about things of a doubtful nature.*"

Dr. EDMUND STAUNTON, President of *Corpus Christi* college, Oxford, and a member of the Westminster Assembly, "always accommodated himself to those that differed from him, as far as his love of truth would permit, saying, *All men must have their grains of allowance: the most knowing Christians know but in part.* He

would freely converse, and communicate also, with those that *held the Head, though in other things erroneous.*" Yet, notwithstanding this latitude of charity, "his zeal for God (to use the words of David) did *eat him up.*"

JOHN JONES, "a bold reprover of sin, was of the congregational persuasion, of a Catholic spirit, and for holding communion with all that agreed in the main points of Christianity, though they entertained different sentiments about lesser matters. He told some of his friends who were for separating from their brethren *because they were not altogether of their own principles*, that, "*for his part, he would be one with every body that was one with Christ.*" Admirable sentence! worthy to be written, as a motto, in letters of gold, over the doors of every place of Christian worship.

WILLIAM BAGSHAW. "His administration of the sacraments, especially that of the Lord's Supper, was very solemn. As he would not admit the grossly ignorant and profane to that sacred feast, so he *durst not exclude those* in whom he saw any thing of the image of Christ, though they were of different sentiments from him in lesser matters of religion."

EDMUND CALAMY, "abhorred a close and narrow spirit, which affects, or confines religion to, a party : and was much rather for a com-

prehension,” (i. e. for a scheme of union and communion embracing those who are *substantially* sound, leaving smaller matters free,) “than for a perpetual separation.”

JOHN FARROL: “an humble, peaceable, laborious divine.” When ejected for non-conformity, “his custom was to go to the public (established) church,” from which he had been cast out, “as his people also did; and either before or after to preach in private.”

DANIEL POYNTELL, so remarkably blessed in his ministry that he had “scarcely a prayerless family in his parish,” used, even after his ejectionment by the Bartholomew act, to hold ministerial fellowship with the establishment; by preaching after the order of the church of England, as he had opportunity, to his old flock at *Staplehurst*.

ISAAC AMBROSE, the well-known author of the treatise entitled, *Looking unto Jesus*, was one of above *twenty* ministers who met at Bolton, after the Restoration of CHARLES II, “to consult what course to take. Mr. Ambrose and Mr. Cole, of *Preston*, declared before them all, that they could read the *Common Prayer*, and should do it; the state of their places requiring it, in which, otherwise, their service was now necessarily at an end.”

☞ “The ministers, considering the cir-

cumstances of their case, *approved their proceeding.*”

JOHN RICHARDSON, “in his judgment about church-matters was moderate and sober; never condemning any for differing from him about conformity,” viz. to the church of England, “whom he thought to be godly. He frequented Dr. *Cumberland’s*, (afterwards Bishop of Peterborough’s,) lecture at Stamford. At *Kirkton* he went constantly to the church, came betimes, joined in the liturgy, and received the sacrament.”

EDMUND TRENCH, in his diary, July 5, 1677, remarks, that “troublesome, censorious, dividing spirits had occasioned more thoughts of those unhappy controversies about forms and ceremonies, church government, &c., and I was still more satisfied, even when most serious, that the bitter extremes of *Dissenters*, as well as of rigid *Conformists*, were highly displeasing to God: that spiritual pride, narrow-spirited mistakes, and grievous wresting of the holy Scriptures, were the evil roots of unchristian divisions and real schism. I was much grieved at such uncharitable and love-killing principles and practices.”

Agreeably to this “Christian catholicism,” he, on the one hand, offered to Mr. B. the minister of the parish, “to preach once a day

gratis, and read the common prayer in the afternoon ;” and “ on the other hand, he refused to countenance a certain non-conformist minister there, as on other accounts, so principally for his binding his people against all communion with the parish churches.”

MATTHEW MEAD, author of *The Almost Christian tried and cast*. “ His judgment, in reference to matters of church order, was for union and communion of all visible Christians ; viz. of such as did visibly ‘ hold the Head,’ as to the principal *credenda* and *agenda* of Christianity—the great things belonging to the faith and practice of a Christian ; so as nothing be necessary to Christian communion but what *Christ has made necessary*, or what is indeed necessary to one’s being a Christian. What he publicly essayed to this purpose the world knows ; and many more private endeavors and strugglings of his for such an union, I have not been unacquainted with. The unsuccessfulness of which endeavors, he said, not long before his last confinement, he thought would break his heart.”

FRANCIS TALLENTS. “ In king *William’s* time, when overtures were made towards a comprehension, some gentlemen, who greatly valued his judgment, sent for him to London to discourse with him about it ; particularly

concerning the re-ordaining of such as were ordained by presbyters. Upon mature deliberation he declared that he could not submit to it : and drew up his reasons at large. But he was much for occasional conformity, as a token of charity towards those whom we cannot statedly join with. In 1691 he entered into his new place of worship—and caused it to be written on the walls “ *That it was built not for a faction or party, but for promoting repentance, and faith in communion with all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.*” And in speaking of the glory of the church in the latter times, he used to say, “ When God shall repair its breaches and build it up, the subtilities of the schools, and many canons of councils, and customs of old, will be laid aside ; and a great simplicity in things of faith and worship will be owned and practiced. *No more conditions shall be made for the communion of churches than Christ has made for communion with him.*”

JOSEPH ALLEINE, author of that celebrated book, entitled, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, though he suffered a long imprisonment because he would not cease from his ministry after his ejection, yet “ often attended the worship of the parish churches, and encouraged his people to do the same.”

ANTHONY BURGESS, a member of the Westminster Assembly, “after his ejection, lived in a very cheerful and pious manner, frequenting and encouraging the ministry of the conforming clergyman.”

GEORGE HOPKINS, himself a Presbyterian, after his ejection “frequented the parish church, with his family; received the holy communion, and did all things required of him as a lay member of the church of England.”

The reader must not suppose that these are all the instances which can be quoted. They are taken from a much larger list now before me; and are given merely as a sample of the views, feelings, and practice, which prevailed among the English Puritans at and near the time of the Westminster Assembly. They furnish an index to the public mind and habits. The persons to whom they relate may be considered, like the Assembly itself, as a sort of committee reflecting the light, and reporting the judgment, of evangelical England. They were no creatures of faction. They were neither obstinate in peculiarities, nor yet “driven about by every wind of doctrine.” In “malice,” they were indeed “children;” but in “understanding” they were “men.” Such men, that there was hardly an individual

among them of whom Nature, and Nature Christianized, might not “stand up and say to all the world, *this was a MAN!*” They were men of superior talent, of high scholarship, intimately acquainted with the whole body of Christian theology and history. They were deeply versed in the Scriptures. They gave their days and nights to the study of the sacred volumes. They bowed implicitly to the authority of God; but would allow no other “lord of their conscience.” With all their meekness and submission to the “higher powers” they were perfectly intractable on the capital points of faith and duty. Neither ecclesiastical nor secular authority; no bishops nor dukes; no king nor parliament; neither flattery nor threats; preferment nor penalties, could move them here. Yet with this adamant firmness in essentials, they were gentle and pliant in secondary things. For the “answer of a good conscience,” they “took joyfully the spoiling of their goods; enduring grief” to prosecutions, fines, disgrace, poverty, hunger, cold, bonds, banishment. Yet, under this accumulation of sorrows, enough, one would suppose, to chill every warm feeling of the heart, they were full “of life and love;” they contended for communion with all Christian churches, even with that

church whose rulers were then oppressing them ! Christians, look at this fact. Remember it was these men, and such as these, who framed the Westminster confession ; and say, upon your responsibility before God, whether the construction which shuts *church-communion* out of their doctrine of the *communion of saints* can possibly be correct ? It is certainly true —these pages show it, that much aversion from communion, especially with the establishment, was to be found, after the Bartholomew-act, in some ministers and congregations. But was it general ? Was it not chiefly among “gathered churches ?” Was it considered as conformable to Christian principle ? As obedience to Christ ? As a solid and pre-eminent part of a reformation-testimony ? Or as the very reverse ? Did not the concurring judgment of the best, wisest, holiest, boldest, most experienced advocates of, and sufferers for, the truth, lament it, condemn it, resist it ? Did they not deplore its progress as the triumph of petty strifes over gospel unity ? As a conspiracy of pride and ignorance to lay waste the kingdom of God under pretext of defending it ? Open their volumes and answer.

The spirit of Catholic fellowship flourished, amid suffering, on the continent also. The

“burning fiery furnace” kindled anew, tried and purified the churches of France ! but the “smell of fire” passed not upon those garments which they wore as followers of the Son of God. All that they endured from papal perfidy was much too little to pervert their judgment or poison their affections on the subject of fraternal charity. Let them speak for themselves through their public organ, the great *John Claude*. In a work which received their official sanction, he says, “The points which divide us,” Papists and Protestants, “are points neither of simple discipline, as that for which *Victor* bishop of Rome separated his church from those of Asia, which celebrated Easter on the 14th day of the moon—nor simply scholastic questions which consist in terms far removed from the knowledge of the people ; as that which is called *trium capitulorum*, which excited so many troubles in the time of the emperor *Justinian* and pope *Vigilius*—nor simple personal interests, as in the schisms of the antipopes—nor crimes nor accusations purely personal, as in the schism of the Donatists—nor even a general corruption of manners, although it was very great in the Clergy during the time of our fathers. The articles which separate us are points which, in our view, trouble essentially the faith whereby we

are united to JESUS CHRIST—points which alter, essentially, the worship we owe to God ; which damage, essentially, the sources of our justification ; and which corrupt the means, internal and external, of obtaining both grace and glory. In a word, they are points which we believe to be altogether incompatible with salvation ; and which, consequently, do not permit us to give the title or concede the quality of a true church of JESUS CHRIST to a party which is confirmed in their professsion and practice ; and aims at compelling us to the same thing.

“ I acknowledge that our controversies are not *all* of such importance. There are, without doubt, some of less weight and force ; on which reformation were desirable ; but which, nevertheless, could not, of themselves, furnish a just cause of separation. I place in this rank the question about the *Limbus* of the ancient fathers—that of the local descent of JESUS CHRIST into hell—that of the distinction between presbyters and bishops by divine right—that of the observation of *Lent* ; and some others of the same sort ; where we readily perceive there was error and superstition to correct ; *but which were not sufficient to cause a rupture of communion* : Accordingly it

was not for such things that our fathers quitted the church of Rome."

What think you, reader, of this declaration on the part of the French churches in 1672, only a few years before they were to pour out their blood afresh as martyrs to the truth of the Lord Jesus? Does it bear any resemblance to our sectarianism? Has it anything in common with those maxims of disunion which put us apart and render us mutually cold, suspicious, hostile?

If this be staggering, what shall we say to a public deed of the church of *Scotland* nearly forty years later, placing church-communion explicitly upon principles common to the Reformed Churches? It is an act of her General Assembly, entitled, "*Act concerning the receiving of strangers into church-communion, and baptizing their children;*" and runs as follows:

"The General Assembly considering that all due encouragement ought to be given to persons educated in the Protestant churches, who have come, or may come, to reside in this country, and may incline to join in communion with this church; Therefore they hereby recommend to all ministers, in whose parishes any such strangers may happen to reside, to shew all tenderness to them when they come

to desire the benefit of sealing ordinances : And if such strangers, being free of scandal, and professing their faith in Christ and obedience to him, shall desire baptism to their children, ministers shall cheerfully comply with their desire in administering the sacrament of baptism to their children, upon the parents engaging to educate them in the fear of God, and knowledge of the principles of the Reformed Protestant religion.”

Let us analyze this act.

It was passed for the purpose of receiving “*strangers* into church-communion ;” they *continuing* strangers, and not accounting themselves plenary members of the church of *Scotland*. For about the reception of a person wishing to become such a member, and giving due satisfaction as to his principles and character, there could be no scruple in her ministers ; and no necessity of an act of the General Assembly to secure due “tenderness.” Men are not apt to be harsh in their treatment of decent applicants for admission into *their* church.

It contemplated and provided for the reception of such strangers into *habitual* communion. For it distinctly specifies their *residing* in the country as strangers ; and the probability of their having *several* children to offer in baptism ;

and says nothing about the *term* of their residence: all which puts their case out of the limits of *extraordinary* and *transient* fellowship.

In order to this regular, habitual, church-communion, it does not require of these strangers an approbation of all or any *peculiarities* in the church of *Scotland*, but simply a credible Christian character, and a promise, when the communion was in the form of baptism, to educate their children, not—be it noticed—not according to the standards of the church of *Scotland*; but according to the principles of the Reformed Protestant religion! Hence it appears,

1. That this act was passed for the purpose of facilitating communion with strangers who did not even *pretend* to *join* the church of *Scotland* as complete members.

2. That the church of *Scotland*, at this time, required nothing as a term of full communion with her, but what was *common* to “the principles of the Reformed Protestant religion.” And

3. That a member of any reformed church in any part of the world, not acting unworthy of his profession, was entitled, upon that ground, to an equal participation with her own members in her most sacred, i. e. in her sealing ordinances.

Here is now the church of *Scotland*, the only national church on earth adhering to the Westminster confession; and which had adhered to it from the beginning—the very church from which we have sprung; and in that state in which we glory to have sprung from her, giving to the world her official construction of the article concerning the “*communion of saints* ;” giving it freely and frankly; without passion, or pressure, or party-feeling: and giving it in flat contradiction to the construction of those who for the last eighty years have claimed to be her genuine sons; but who were under the pressure, if not of passion, yet certainly of party.

Who is likely to be right? Christians! as in the sight of God, judge ye!

On this particular point, viz. “*the communion of saints*,” the argument is conceived to have fully made out the three following propositions—

1. That the phrase, “communion of saints,” was originally intended to express “church-communion;” and was understood to express it by all parts of the Christian church down to the time of the Westminster assembly.

2. That the very terms of the article so entitled in their confession, as well as collateral expressions, prove that it must be understood

in the then established sense, and cannot admit of any other.

3. That it not only continued to be so understood privately and publicly ; by individuals and by churches adopting that confession, for nearly, if not quite, a century later ; but that the opinion and practice of the best and holiest men who were contemporary with, or flourished shortly after, that memorable assembly, coincided perfectly with the doctrine of this volume.

It is not necessary to go into further details. The preceding pages are believed to have shown, that the communion for which they plead is enjoined in the word of God—was understood to be so enjoined by the Apostolic and primitive church—was acted upon under that persuasion—was contended for in opposition to every sort of sectaries—was asserted, and the doctrine of it inserted, in the briefest summary of faith ever current in the churches, the apostles' creed—was maintained at the revival of the cause of God and truth at the Reformation—was practiced to the greatest extent in the best of churches in the best of times—was cordially received by that venerable representation of evangelical interests, the assembly of divines at Westminster—is in perfect unison with the known convictions and

conduct of the most glorious champions of the cross whom England ever saw—was not only received, but is formally, explicitly, and fully, maintained in their confession of faith—has been re-asserted and vindicated by the church of *Scotland* thirty years before the *Secession*; and stands, at this hour, a conspicuous part of the solemn, public, profession of churches which, on both sides of the Atlantic, have originated from her.

Were it safe to reason from profession to conduct, the inference from these premises would be, that all who have adopted the Westminster confession of faith as the confession of their own faith, would most cordially reciprocate the best offices of Christian love; would join together in sweet communion; would hail as a brother, and welcome to their sacramental table, every one who bears the image of their glorified Lord.

But what are the facts? Not only is the Catholic church divided, but many even of those particular churches which are thus united in the same faith, and organized under, substantially, the same order, stand aloof from each other as if they were “strangers and foreigners,” and not “fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.” In some of them, at least, the very fact of belonging as

a member to any other Christian denomination, is a regular and almost insuperable obstacle to communion. If a Christian, however his character and conversation may adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour, should happen, in the course of providence, to be present at one of their "solemn feasts," and should desire, with them, to "pay his vows unto the Lord," he is repulsed. "Why? Are not his professed principles the same with your own?" "The very same." "Does he not give as satisfactory proofs of 'living by faith upon the Son of God,' as are given by those whom you invite, welcome, urge to your sacramental fellowship?" "It cannot be denied." But identity of principle and a life of faith upon the Son of God are *lame recommendations!* It is not enough that he is a *Christian*, he must also be a *sectarian*; to follow *Christ* goes for nothing, unless he follow *us*: And so, with the traits of his master's image strong upon him, he is shut out among the profane!!

On the other hand, when members of these churches have an opportunity of showing forth the Lord's death in a church which wears his name, though it wears not theirs; and breathes his spirit, though it repeat not their watch-word, nor keep their countersign; they will not, when asked, touch his sacred

memorials. “ *This do in remembrance of ME,*” weighs upon their consciences no where but in their own precincts; and they will rather withhold their testimony to his dying love, than recognize their union with fellow-believers all whose feelings and habits have not been melted down and amalgamated with their own peculiarities in the crucible of party-zeal. Should they, however, at any time, break these restrictions—should they mingle their tears of thankfulness, and their hymns of praise, with those who having “obtained like precious faith with themselves,” are putting their seal to their privileges and their hope at the table of their common Lord, they become objects of suspicion; their conduct is reproved as disorderly; the communion which they have held is pronounced *offensive*; and their brethren become as alarmed and indignant, as if their honoring the Lord Jesus Christ in his *acknowledged* ordinances and members were a real scandal; an “iniquity to be punished by the judges!!”

Nay, to such a length is this fastidiousness carried in certain churches, that the simple *hearing* of the gospel, from the mouth of the most faithful minister who happens not to be within their own circle, is accounted an *ecclesiastical crime*; and a sufficient ground of church-

censure! And should a minister be, on any occasion, admitted in ministerial communion to one of their pulpits, however honored he may have been of God—I tremble to write it—Blasphemy itself could hardly excite a greater ferment!! It would be vain to deny the accuracy of this statement. It is the truth, the *plain* truth, and nothing but the truth. The facts which justify it are notorious to the whole world.

Such being the relative situation of several churches, comprising many congregations, and an immense multitude of individuals, it is natural to inquire into the history of so strange a phenomenon.

It may be laid down as a general rule with regard to human disagreements, that the causes which produce them are very different from the reasons which are assigned for their vindication: It being nothing uncommon, with our sinful and inconsistent race, to father upon *Conscience* the offspring of *Passion*: and to clothe with the sanctions of religion, whatever accords with the power of habit, or flatters the vanity of *name*. But supposing the present case to be an exception: that the churches have, in this instance, escaped the common infirmity; and that the *alleged* are the *real* causes of their distant, not to say

hostile, deportment toward each other ; it is impossible, considering the scriptural doctrine and their own concurrent faith concerning the unity of the body of Christ, it is impossible for a sound mind to be convinced by any thing short of demonstration, that their actual state is either pleasing to God or beneficial to man. Nor is this an unreasonable demand—For,

Every church refusing to hold communion with another, does, by that fact, declare herself to be too pure for such communion ; i. e. that such communion would contaminate her in the eyes of her God, and bring down upon her the tokens of his displeasure. It needs no proofs that a church must be *very sure* of her own pretensions before she venture upon such high and dangerous ground—*very sure* that the mantle of her excluding zeal does not cover offences against the Lord her God quite as provoking as those which she charges upon others—that there is no place for the Jewish proverb, *Physician ! heal thyself*, or for the heathen aphorism,

—*mutato nomine de TE*

Fabula narratur—

—that she does not wink at abuses in her own

members, which she laments and reprobates in her neighbors. It is the more necessary for her to be *sure* of her own sanctity, as the very assumption of a censorial power over her Christian sisters invites the most unsparing scrutiny: and no honorable mark is affixed by Truth itself, to those who, regardless of their own faults, say, *Stand by thyself; come not near me; for I am holier than thou!*

The refusal of one evangelical church to hold communion with another is, in appearance at least, an offence against the visible unity of the body of Christ, and against his commandment to cultivate that unity at the expense of much inconvenience, and even of many sacrifices. Difference of denomination, it must be owned, does not *necessarily* involve this consequence: but exclusive communions, founded on that difference, it will be difficult to acquit from the imputation.

In fine—To refuse communion with a church or with her members is, in effect, to unchurch her, and to declare that she is no church, and that her members are no followers, of Jesus Christ. At least it is a declaration that they are so very corrupt as to render their communion *unlawful*. Now, such a declaration, whether expressed or implied, can be viewed as nothing less, on the part of those who make

it, than an *excommunication* in disguise—but a disguise so thin that it might as well be dropped. For what is excommunication (the heaviest penalty in the kingdom of God) but a judicial exclusion from the communion of the church on account of the *unworthiness* of the excommunicated; i. e. the *unlawfulness* of holding communion with them? If then you *refuse* communion with a church or with individuals, justifying your refusal by the plea of their *corruptness*, your conduct is a virtual denial of their visible Christianity; and having already the substance, wants nothing but the form, of an excommunicating act. This consequence, viz. the virtual unchurching and excommunicating all the churches and people of God upon earth with whom we *refuse* communion, is so dreadful that every Christian heart shrinks from it with fear and horror. It is, therefore, disowned and rejected by the most strenuous opponents of catholic fellowship. We are glad to acquit their *intentions*; but cannot so easily acquit their *argument*, or their *practice*. They shut out from their communion other Christians and churches: what is this but excommunication? what more can they do to the blasphemer and the profligate? This draws deep. For the scriptural doctrine, common to Protestant Christendom, is, that

“heinous violations of the law of God in practice ; and such errors in principle as unhinge the Christian profession, are the only scandals for which the sentence of excommunication should be passed.” Where it is inflicted, either formally or practically, for less weighty reasons, for secular ends, or through the influence of party-passions, there can be but one opinion among Christians who are not infatuated by their own share in the sin—it is a deed which the Lord our God will never ratify in heaven ; and which owes to his marvellous forbearance whatever immunity it enjoys from prompt and exemplary punishment on earth.

Seeing, therefore, that the refusing our communion to other Christians when it is desired, and the declining theirs when it is offered, involve claims of great peril, if not of great presumption—are an apparent violation of that unity which our master has commanded us to maintain—and treat many members of the household of faith like open unbelievers ; virtually excommunicating them, as if they were blots and scandals to their holy calling—Seeing these things, it becomes us to pause : to review our proceedings as those “who shall give account :” and to be thoroughly satisfied, by an honest and intelligent examination of the

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word of God, that our reasons shall be found valid and ourselves acquitted at his tribunal; lest we meet with the rebuke of those who “make sad the hearts which he has not made sad ;” and instead of honoring and comforting, “smite their fellow-servants,” with the aggravation of smiting them in *His* name.

PART III.

A Review of Objections.

WHAT, then, are the objections to a more liberal communion than we have been accustomed to cherish? *What* are those imperative considerations which, apparently, in the face of plain scriptural injunction of our own solemn profession; and of dangers enough, one would suppose, to appal the stoutest heart, do, nevertheless, *forbid* us to reciprocate frank and cordial fellowship with all *acknowledged* Christians and Christian churches? In so far as the author can discover, they are, substantially, the following, viz.

“That God may hold communion with those with whom we may not—

“That so general a communion as this plea inculcates, would prostrate all scriptural distinction between the precious and the vile, and that salutary discipline by which the house of God is to be kept from pollution—

“That it involves an approbation of abuses and corruptions in churches with which it is

held; and thus makes us partakers of other men's sins—

“That by giving public countenance to churches erroneous or corrupt, it destroys the force, or at least shackles the freedom, of a faithful testimony to Christ and his truth—

“That it not only diminishes the value, but supersedes the necessity, and impeaches the propriety, of all that service which, in every age, the churches of God have rendered to ‘pure and undefiled religion,’ by their judicial confessions of faith—

“That as communìon presupposes and is founded upon union, it is a contradiction to hold communion with churches with which we are not united; and, therefore, that all such communion is inconsistent with distinct ecclesiastical organization—

“That whatever may have been the practice of primitive times, the state of the church is so greatly altered as make the imitation of them inexpedient, if not impracticable, now—

“That whereas the sentiments and examples of holy men and evangelical churches, in later days, may seem to thwart the strain of these objections, and to throw their advocates into the dilemma of either aspersing those whom they profess to venerate, or convicting themselves of schism, all such sentiments and ex-

amples were adapted to *extraordinary circumstances*, and are inapplicable to any regular state—and

“ That all Christians, being one in spirit, the best ends of their communion may be answered, in their present state of separation, without the evils incident to its public extension.

If there are other objections affecting the general question, they have not come to the author's knowledge, nor occurred to his reflections. But if these, or any considerable part of them, are well founded, there can be no doubt that his whole preceding argument is overthrown—that his doctrine labors under some radical fallacy—and that the practice which has grown out of it at *New York* and elsewhere, has given just offence, and merits severe reprehension.

Yet plausible as they are, and solid as they appear to many honest and respectable men, it may be allowed, without the imputation of arrogance, to try their soundness: and, long as they have had possession of the popular ear, to show that in this, as in other instances, the popular favor has been unwisely bestowed.

Considering the very great difficulties with which they would press us, it is surprising that *not one of them is so much as noticed in the word of God!* If the communion of his church

is to be so circumscribed, not to say fastidious --If the religious intercourse of his own people with each other is so materially influenced by variance in things which may confessedly stand with the substance of his truth and the power of his grace ; if Christians of different name, by meeting at the table of their Redeemer, break down the hedges which he has set about his vineyard ; make themselves reciprocally chargeable with whatever error or sin may be found in their respective denominations ; and instead of building up, destroy his kingdom—it is “ passing strange ” that neither their master nor his apostles should have cautioned them against the peril ! Nay, that the language of his word when treating of this very subject ; and especially when rectifying abuses and settling controversies, should be absolutely silent on the topics of objection ; and rather calculated to lead Christians into mistake ! For it cannot be denied, that while their union, love, and fellowship, as members of *His* body, are inculcated with deep solemnity and enforced by awful motives, those impediments to communion, so formidable in our eyes, *have not even a place* among the inspired discussions ! Did not the Lord Jesus foresee them ? Were not human infirmities and passions and sins

the same in the days of Paul as they have been ever since? Do not the writings of this wondrous man, and the apostolic history by Luke, record facts which modern opinion and practice—the opinion and practice of many among ourselves—the spirit of the foregoing objections, would consider as not only warranting, but demanding, separate connections, and interdicting communion between their members? And yet did either Paul or the other apostles advise or countenance any such measure? On the contrary, while *we* seem to dread communion between all those who “call on the name of the Lord Jesus,” as dangerous to the purity of his church and the answer of a good conscience, did *they* not seem to dread the disruption of it as inconsistent with her unity, as unfriendly to her peace, and scandalous to her name? And this, notwithstanding objections which, upon the principles of the objectors were as obvious then as they can be now? Whence this prodigious difference between their views and ours? Did they not understand the interest of the church? Did they not regard it? Did they leave to the wisdom of these latter days a remedy for evils against which their master made no provision? and commit to *our* hands the finishing of *His* imperfect work? Or in

very deed are the objections faulty and false ? This is more probable. Let us, then, weigh them in the balances, and see if we can discover wherein they are wanting.

The scope of this treatise being to show that we are bound to fellowship with those whose "fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

1. The first objection is for making short work with the whole matter, by granting the premises and denying the conclusion—maintaining that "God may and does hold communion with those with whom we may not;" and, therefore, that the whole superstructure of church-communion, built upon the foundation of communion with him, falls to the ground.

Such an objection is of strange hearing in Christian ears which have been unaccustomed to it; and may be treated as a phantom which has been raised for the pleasure of laying it again. But it is no phantom—It has a real existence, and a strong power over men respectable for their understanding, amiable for their benevolence, and venerable for their piety. It was urged upon the author many years ago, by an excellent Anti-Burgher minister, remarkable for the cheerfulness of his temper and the Catholicism of his feelings.

The conversation turned upon the separation of the Burgher and Anti-Burgher churches. "Do you not account the Burgher churches to be true churches of Jesus Christ?" "I do." "Do you not believe that the gospel of Christ is purely preached there, his ordinances scripturally administered, his people edified, and his presence enjoyed?" "O, yes." "Why, then, will you not hold communion with them?" The reply was in the very words quoted, "God may hold communion with those with whom we may not." The objection is, then, worthy of a serious examination.

It must have one of three senses, viz.

Either that God holds *secret* communion with some with whom his people, who are vitally united to Christ, can have no such communion :

Or, That God holds *secret* communion with some with whom his *professing* people may not hold *public* communion :

Or, That God holds *public* communion with some with whom his church may not hold it.

According to the *first* of these senses, the proposition is neither sound in itself, nor relative to the argument.

Not sound in itself; God holds no *secret* communion with an unregenerated man. And

all regenerated men have, in virtue of union with Christ their head, both union and communion with each other; union and communion utterly independent on their own will; and which they can neither break nor avoid.

Not relative to the argument; For the question is not about invisible and secret, but about visible and public communion.

In its *second* sense, the proposition is true; but not more applicable than in the first. For no intelligent Christian will admit that things which are an absolute secret between God and the soul, can be a rule of proceeding to his church: nor is the right of communion with her ever placed on such a footing.

In the *third*, which is its only remaining sense, viz. that "God holds *public* communion with some with whom his church may not," the proposition is, indeed, strictly applicable; but, at the same time, materially incorrect.

1. It runs directly counter to the strain of scriptural authority.

"That which we have seen and heard," says John the beloved, "declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

The gospel, according to this apostle, is "declared" with a view of conferring upon

men those blessed privileges, that transcendently valuable interest, of which he and his fellow-believers had already the possession. He calls it “fellowship; i. e. communion, or an interest “common” to all concerned. But wherein consists its value? What renders it so ineffably desirable and glorious? This: “Our fellowship, our communion,” saith the apostle, “is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Now if our communion with God is a sufficient reason for inviting others to communion with us; then his communion with others is a sufficient reason for our communion with them. For our invitation must be addressed to believers or to unbelievers. If to believers, it can be nothing short of a cordial welcome to participate with us in all our privileges as the “sons of God;” and so the apostle has settled the question of the *whole* communion which Christians *can* have together; and settled it exactly and explicitly upon this principle, that they have communion with God. If, on the other hand, our invitation is to unbelievers; it can mean nothing short of an earnest exhortation to become sharers with us, by faith, in all that fellowship which flows from our fellowship with God. And would it not be singularly inconsistent, thus to invite *unbelievers* upon the very argument and plea

that “our communion is with God; and the moment they become *believers*, and show that their communion also is with God, to turn round and tell them that communion with *Him* is not a sufficient warrant for communion with *us*?

Again; the Apostle Paul lays upon Christians the following injunction; “Receive ye one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”

This “receiving” can be interpreted of nothing but of their embracing each other in all holy affection and fellowship; for so Christ had “received” them. The injunction has for its immediate object the repression of those jealousies, alienations, and divisions, which had originated, or were likely to originate, from the dispute about meats and days in the church at Rome. But the rule is general; and has decided,

That matters which destroy not communion with Christ are not to destroy the communion of Christians: But

That when one Christian, or party of Christians, sees the tokens of Christ’s approbation and presence with another, the warrant is perfect, and the duty imperative, to reciprocate all the offices of Christian love, with a kindness and generosity modelled after Christ’s

example to them both. If this does not import a command to hold communion, church-communion, with all who give evidence of being in communion with Christ; and precisely for that reason, it will be difficult to find a commandment in the Bible. "There is no cause, therefore," says Calvin in his commentary on the preceding verse, "there is no cause for a man's boasting that he will glorify God in his own way. For of so great moment in God's sight is the unity of his servants, that he will not permit his glory to sound forth amidst dissensions and strifes. This one thought should effectually restrain that mad passion for contest and quarrel which fills the minds of many at the present day."

2. The objection is subversive of all church-communion whatsoever.

Visible Christianity; i. e. a profession and walk such as we have a right to expect from the disciples of Christ, is the only and the uncontested ground of ecclesiastical fellowship.

But what is this "visible Christianity?" This "profession and walk of Christ's disciples?" Why is it required? And what is its use? Is it anything else than the external effect and indication of communion with God? Is it of any other use in the present question than to ascertain, as far as can be ascertained

by outward evidence, that its possessors are the people of God ? If, then, communion with him—if being his people, owned of him as such, is not, of itself, a sufficient reason for our communion with them in those ordinances which are appointed expressly for their benefit, there can be no church-communion at all. The thing is impossible : at least it is impossible in the church of *God*—What communion, upon different principles, there may be in churches of *man's* making, is another question ; but a question which it were profaneness and pollution so much as to agitate.

Instead, therefore, of conceding that God holds visible communion with some with whom we may not, I shall reverse the position ; and say, that I ought, and will, and shall, as I have opportunity, hold communion with all who have communion with God, to the whole extent of the proof of such communion ; and account it my unutterable privilege. I will not be afraid nor ashamed to be found in company with any person in *anything*, be it sacramental service or other act of worship, when the God of my salvation deigns to be of the party. No power on earth shall hinder me from saying, “I will go with you,” to any to whom I can add, “for God is with you.” On this ground I will venture my peace, my

soul, my eternal blessedness! And let those who refuse to walk in “church-communion” with such as “walk with God,” look well after the account which they shall be able to render.

II. The second objection supposes that “the doctrine of church-communion, upon the principle of the common salvation, with all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, compels us to admit every one who passes himself for a Christian; and thus, by abolishing the distinction between the precious and the vile, prostrates the scriptural discipline, and lays open the house of God to utter profanation.”

It will be well for those who make this objection, if they shall be found to distinguish, in their *own* communion, between the “precious and the vile,” with that anxiety which their argument professes.

But to the argument itself. A general profession of Christianity, as is shown by every day’s experience, may be, and often is, compatible with the want of every Christian influence, and even with hostility to almost every Christian doctrine. To let it serve as an apology for error and vice; and, under its broad protection, to admit to communion men who evince neither repentance toward God, nor faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, would

be, indeed, to confound the holy with the profane; to turn the temple of God into a den of thieves; and to destroy the very end and essence of sacramental fellowship. The objectors themselves cannot have a more firm and founded abhorrence of such infidel charity, such latitude of ruin, than has the writer of these remarks. But they should remember that if their objection is conclusive against him, it is equally conclusive against the confession of their faith, and the word of their God. For the language of both extends the privilege of whatever communion the church enjoys to all them who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. Such a consequence they will assuredly disown and disprove. And when they shall have vindicated their confession and their Bible from the charge of so great an absurdity, they will have refuted their own objection.

But to reply more directly, I add,

1. That the objection is altogether inapplicable to the communion here defended. For it is, expressly, communion with those who are *acknowledged* to be Christians by the objectors themselves. And surely communion with such as give evidence of their having “received Christ Jesus the Lord, and of their walking in him,” contains neither principle nor prece-

dent for the admission of such as do not give proof of either. To welcome friends and brethren is not to encourage aliens and enemies.

2. "Calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus," is not a loose nor equivocal phrase. It is a comprehensive, yet precise and well-defined, character of a real and orderly Christian. Its terms must be interpreted by those fuller declarations of the scripture to which it refers, and of which it is a summary.

Thus, the "NAME" of Jesus includes whatever is peculiar to him as the Saviour of sinners : ex. gr. the doctrine of his *person* ; of his *righteousness* ; of his *sacrifice* ; of his *intercession* ; of his *authority*—briefly, of his *fulness*, as the fountain of all that grace which his redeemed receive now, and of all that glory which they shall enjoy hereafter. Therefore, in the scriptural, which is the only true sense, no man can name his blessed name without cherishing the faith of those cardinal truths which relate to his character and work.

"*Calling*," upon the name of the Lord Jesus is equivalent to such a profession of faith in him as contains the embracing him in his saving offices ; bearing testimony to his cause and cross ; waiting upon him in his ordinances ; addressing him in acts of direct worship ; sub-

mitting to his authority ; and keeping his commandments. *Let every one, says Paul, who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.* This is our great practical test. They who are without the *doctrine* of Christ, must not, indeed, presume to talk of their *virtues* : But, on the other hand, they who do not glorify him as “made of God unto them *sanctification*, crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts,” and studying to be “holy in all manner of conversation,” can derive no true comfort from their doctrinal accuracy ; nor be allowed to plead it as a valid title to sacramental fellowship. “Faith without works is *dead*,” in the judgment of both God and man.

If, therefore, a professed Christian shall reject truths, or vent errors, affecting the substance of the gospel ; or shall dishonor it by a wicked life, he is a subject of the punitive discipline of the church ; and, by the law of Christ, is to be shut out from the communion of the faithful till he acquire a sounder mind, and be recovered from the snare of the devil.

About these things there can be little difference of opinion. All the churches concerned in the present disquisition have, evidently, when they explain themselves, the same view of what is meant by “calling on the name of the Lord Jesus.” So that by extending our

communion to such as answer this description, wherever they are found, we incur no danger of throwing open the sanctuary of God to every or to any intruder. It is very possible that a grievous blackslider from both truth and duty may yet retain that "seed of God" which abideth forever; and be, at the very time of his scandal, a believer in heart; and one who shall, eventually, "see the Lord." Such was *Noah*; such was *Lot*; such was *David*; such was *Peter*. If it is the same with others, so much the better for themselves. But the church having no power to "search the heart and try the reins of the children of men," can look only "on the outward appearance," Whatever an applicant for her communion may be in the sight of God, he is not, he cannot be, a Christian in her sight, unless he *visibly* maintain the faith, and keep the commandments, of Jesus Christ. She has nothing to do with his secret state. In this matter she is to believe only what she can see; or rather is to give credit for what she cannot see, only on account of what she can. Christianity of the heart, unattested by Christianity of the mouth in "a good confession," and of the life, in "fruit unto holiness," is, to her, no Christianity at all.

The second objection, then, viz., that our

holding communion with Christians *as such*; that is, purely on account of their being Christians, cuts down the hedge of discipline, and exposes the house of God to defilement, is without foundation.

III. It is supposed, and asserted that “by holding communion with members of churches in which there exist corruptions or abuses, we do virtually approve such abuses or corruptions; and do thereby make ourselves partakers of other men’s sins.”

Where is the church which has no corruptions, no abuses? nothing to correct? Let us speak out, and say that we ought never to communicate but with the members of a *perfect* church! For everything which falls short of perfection is an abuse, is a corruption. And, as the rule works both ways, other churches should not, by our own argument, tolerate communion with us whose claim to perfection is not quite indisputable. What a spectacle would this be! What a spectacle is it already, in the eyes of God, of angels, and of men! A number of churches all wearing the name, pleading the authority, possessing substantially the faith, pretending to cherish the spirit, to imitate the example, and to promote the kingdom, of their Redeemer, refusing to hold communion with each other on account of

their respective corruptions! Truth, open thy closed lips and speak out. Say—and let the world hear it—say, that in the bosom of the church of God there is found a feeling and a reasoning, the real tendency of which is to show that there ought to be no sacramental fellowship between Christians of different names under any possible circumstances; and that the whole doctrine of his word concerning the communion of his church, beyond the limits of a particular sect, is a mere deception—a mockery of words without meaning!

This might be, and in itself is, a sufficient answer. But as the objection is a favorite one; and calculated to perplex the tender conscience, it merits a more thorough sifting.

It presents two cases:

First, members of other churches communicating with us.

Secondly, our members communicating with other churches. The principle, however, of both cases being the same, they shall be considered together.

The argument, then, is this:

“We can neither admit to our sacramental table members of other churches, nor ourselves participate in theirs, because there are things in their constitution or practice which we must account to be corruptions; so that by

holding communion with them, in either form, we should, by implication at least, approve what it is our duty to condemn; and thus bring sin upon our own souls.”

If this reasoning is correct; if the conclusion fairly follows from the premises, a man must be blind not to see, that, out of our own sect, there is not now, and never has been, a church with which, or with a single member of which, we can or could have lawful communion. The purest churches, the holiest of saints, the most gallant sons of the truth—reformers, martyrs, apostles, are all under the ban of this terrible proscription; all sink under one fell stroke of this desolating scythe! For not a church can be named from the present hour back to the first age, which had no corruptions to condemn. And is it, indeed, come to this, that neither *Romaine* nor *Hervey*; neither *Baxter* nor *Bates*, nor *Calamy*, nor *Howe*, nor *Owen*, nor *Usher*, nor *Rutherford*—not *Daillé*, nor *Claude*; not *Hooper*, nor *Ridley*, nor *Latimer*, nor *Cranmer*—not *Luther*, nor *Calvin*, nor *Knox*, nor *Melancthon*, nor *Zuinglius*; nor *Huss*, nor *Wickliffe*; no, nor yet *Athanasius*, nor *Augustine*, nor *Cyprian*, nor *Irenæus*, nor *Ignatius*, nor *Polycarp*, nor *Clemens*; not even *Timothy*, or *Titus*, or *Paul*, or *John*—not one on the whole list of evangelical worthies, from the martyr

Stephen down to the missionary *Vander Kemp*, could be permitted, were he on earth, to take a seat with US, at the table of the Lord? For they were all in churches more or less corrupted; some of them corrupted grievously!

And what, let me ask, what, upon such terms, was the condition of God's witnesses for truth during their struggle with Papal Rome, *before* they "came out of her?" Until their separation the church of God was in her. If the objection is sound, no person could lawfully communicate with any of her members: that is to say, *God's own witnesses could not lawfully communicate with his own church!*

I have not forgotten the usual distinction between a *reforming* and a *declining* church: although it does not seem strong enough to bear all the weight which has been laid upon it. It is passed over here, not only because the church of Rome, for centuries of the period referred to, was growing worse and worse in a state of accelerated apostasy, but also because the objection is equally conclusive against communion with a church *in any state whatever*, so long as she retains things which it would be sinful to approve. Let us, therefore, press it a little farther.

1. If communion with a church is to be in-

terpreted as an approbation of *her* sins, then, by the same rule, communion with an individual is to be interpreted as an approbation of *his* sins. And so the communion of saints is cut up by the roots.

It avails nothing to say, that "as the sacramental supper is the act of a church in her social character, we do, by the very fact of communion with her, acknowledge her as a *whole*; and thus, by implication at least, put the seal of our approbation to whatever belongs to her *as a church*."

The difficulty is precisely where it was. I must also take an individual as a whole. His communicating is an act of the whole man. If I cannot, for the purposes of communion, separate the divine ordinances in a church from her corruptions, how can I thus separate the graces of a Christian from his sins? If by communion with her in God's ordinances, I must participate in her corruptions also, how can I commune with a believer in his faith and love, and not participate in the "sin that dwelleth in him?" Let your objection set out from any point, on any course, it cuts up, in its progress, all communion of saints by the very roots.

2. If communicating, as a guest, with another church, involves an approbation of her

sins, by the same rule communicating with my own church involves an approbation of hers, and renders me by so much the more inexcusable, by how much a *transient* act of intercourse with a church in her corruptions whether great or small, is less culpable than that *regular* and *habitual intimacy* with her which is unavoidable by her members. And so we come again to the old result; viz. that there can be no lawful church-communion upon earth: with this addition, that the most exceptionable and criminal form in which it can possibly exist, is communion with *one's own church while a corruption or abuse can be found in her skirts.*

In order to evade this conclusion, good and sensible men have resorted to a distinction of which the soundness is more than doubtful.

They say, that “ what may be wrong in our own church is always supposed to be under our own government. As members of our own church, we must always have some degree of influence over our own government: and as it is our duty to exercise this influence, whatever it may be, at all times and to its utmost extent; we may at all times indulge the hope of having that wrong or those wrongs rectified. But with respect to the errors, or defects, or corruptions, of other churches, till we become

actual members, we can indulge no such hopes.”

This reply, instead of destroying the conclusion against which it is levelled, does, in fact, surrender the objection it was brought forward to defend. That objection was and is, that by the act of communion with an erroneous or corrupted church we patronize her errors or corruptions, i. e. we contract pollution from *contact* with a polluted society. But the contact cannot be the less close, nor the pollution less contagious from the circumstance of the society being our own. Thence it follows that communion here, on account of its intimacy and extent, is worse than any where else, while there is any wrong to be rectified among ourselves. No, says the reply; “We have influence, we have control over our own defects;” therefore, what? Why truly, “we are *not* involved in the sin of our own church by our communion with her.” No other inference can repel the conclusion to which the objection was driven. But the whole ground is changed: and it is *now* asserted that our contamination does not proceed from *communion* with a corrupted church; but from our *inability to purify her*! Here, then, I repeat, is an absolute surrender of the objection which was to have been defended. And the reply con-

tains this curious doctrine, that vices which we *cannot* cure, spread their leprosy over us by contact ; but vices we *can* cure, do not. And that the shortest way of escaping the charge of being partakers in other men's sins, is to go over to their church : and then, as *members*, we shall have influence in reforming her !

But can we seriously persuade ourselves by such a reason, that we may safely communicate at home though not abroad ? Shall a man keep at a prudent distance from the fire on his neighbor's hearth because he has no rightful control over it ; and thrust his naked foot fearlessly into the fire on his own, because he has a well at his door and may extinguish it when he pleases ? Shall he avoid the dirt of his neighbor's premises and wade through the mire of his own, because he can cleanse the one and not the other ? Will his fire or his filth be so charmed by his metaphysics or his rights, as that the one shall not burn nor the other defile him ? And shall the mere *capacity of influencing* the reformation of a church, so neutralize the poison of her sins as that it shall be harmless to her *members*, while it continues deleterious and may be mortal to her *guests* ? Let us not deceive our souls with vain words. There is ground to fear that notions such as have now been com-

batted, quiet the consciences of many who might else be roused ; and compose them securely to sleep under abuses which would startle them in others. They are pleased with dreaming of a power which they never exercise. They *can* rectify the faults of their own church but *do not*. And thus year slips away after year ; and life after life : reformation is loudly called for, and the delay of it severely chided, every where but—at home ! A church which needs *no* reform is yet a desideratum : and a church fairly and honestly setting about the work of her own reformation, is a glory not of this hemisphere. In truth, human passions are so unmanageable in nothing, as in what relates to human sins. Let any man make the experiment, and he shall find that to touch abuses which have become incorporated with the *habits* of society, is to kindle a flame of the most fierce and inextinguishable resentments. It is, therefore, perfectly wild to place the lawfulness of communion with our own church, and the unlawfulness of it with another, upon the footing of our having some *influence* over the former and none over the latter.

It must be some strange mistake, some potent illusion, which can have persuaded worthy and sensible men to adopt such an ob-

jection to Catholic communion; and a more than common distress in maintaining it, which could reduce them to so feeble a defence, as have now been exposed. What is it? Shortly and simply this:

Taking it for granted, that communion with a CHURCH or with her MEMBERS, implies our approbation of her in all things belonging to her ACTUAL CONDITION as an organized body.

We have seen above, that, on such a principle, society cannot exist. But, happily, the whole world being judge, the principle assumed is false. For it might be shown to contradict the practical understanding of men in all the modifications of their intercourse.

The true and only safe rule of interpreting social communion is, that it always goes so far as the *acts* which express it; but is not, *necessarily*, to be considered as extending further.

This rule is of inspired authority. *If any of them that believe not, says Paul, bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go: whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, "This is offered in sacrifice unto idols," eat not.*

The apostle here resolves a case of conscience: viz. *A Pagan invites his Christian neighbor to an entertainment. May he lawfully accept the invitation?*

The inviter sustains a threefold character—as a *host*—as an *infidel*—and as an *idolater*. Thus situated, he asks his Christian friend to eat with him? “What shall I do?” “Go,” says the apostle, “if you be so inclined.” “But how shall I conduct myself with regard to my food; as, in all probability, some of the dishes will be made up of flesh that has been sacrificed to idols?” “Raise no scruples,” rejoins the apostle. “You were invited to *dine*; you go to dine. Your communion with your host is neither in his *infidelity* nor his *idolatry*, but simply in his *dinner*.” “What! if part of that dinner has been offered to idols?” “That is no concern of yours. The creature is in itself good; it is God’s creature: it was granted to you for food; its blood having been shed before an idol’s altar injures the flesh no more than if it had been shed in the slaughter-house. You have nothing to do with it but as *meat*. Receive it with thankfulness, and ask no questions.” “But if my host should *tell* me, ‘this meat is a sacrifice to his idol-god?’” “The case is entirely altered. There is a new condition introduced. You are now invited to fellowship not only in meat, but in idolatry also. Your course is plain. Eat not; not a mouthful: or you are a partaker in your neighbor’s sin.”

The doctrine of the apostle relieves us at once from the difficulty started by the objection under review, and furnishes us with a sure and easy rule of conscience in regard to church-fellowship, viz. *No particular act of Communion is to be interpreted as reaching beyond ITSELF, unless it be coupled with other acts by an EXPRESS or KNOWN condition.*

If, therefore, I sit down at the table of the Lord in another church, or receive one of her members to that holy table in my own, neither my act nor his can fairly be construed as more than an act of communion in “the body and blood of the Lord.” Neither of us has, by virtue of that act, any thing to do with the defects of our respective churches in other matters. “There are errors in doctrine, you cry, “there are corruptions in worship; there is unscriptural government; there is neglect of discipline !”

Be it so. Are these declensions such as consist with “*holding the HEAD?*” If not, I have fallen in with a “synagogue of Satan.” And the question has no reference to communion with Satan or his synagogues. If they are; then is a seat at the Lord’s table *declared or understood* to be a sign of my *approving* them? If it is, Paul has decided for me. The table to *me* is not the table of the Lord.

But if there is no such condition, the sins of my fellow-worshippers are their own: and shall not stand in the way of my testimony to *Christ my passover crucified for me.*

“But if by communicating with a church you do not acknowledge all that belongs to her, what do you acknowledge?” Much, very much. I acknowledge her to be a church, a true church of Jesus Christ; I acknowledge her sacramental table for his own ordinance; where it is my duty to show forth his death, and my privilege to look for a blessed experience of its benefits. This, all this, I acknowledge: acknowledge cheerfully; and can do it without following her directly or indirectly in those things in which she does not follow Christ.

Instead, therefore, of the sacraments being *party-ordinances* among Christians; i. e. ordinances in which we bind ourselves to a *sect*; they are precisely those which are divested of every sectarian quality and mark; whose place is emphatically in the *church-catholic* as such; and which it is impossible, without profane violence, to carry over the threshold of any sectarian temple whatever. Yes, the holy table is the badge of no party but the party of the Son of God. It is here that they who “know his name and put their

trust in him," may and should unite their homage to his cross and their fealty to his service, upon the broad and glorious ground of his having "loved them and washed them from their sins in his own blood." This is the place where *Christians* are not to *put on*, but to *put off*, the *sectarian*, and to say each to his brother, "*Beloved, let us LOVE one another; for love is of GOD.*"

Long as this article is, it cannot be finished without removing another difficulty. "If we are thus to hold communion with visible Christians and Christian churches, how shall we obey the scriptures?" What scriptures? "All those which require us to *keep ourselves pure; To have no fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness; to come out and be separate; especially, to withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly.*" The answer is short. All such scriptures are misapplied. Commandments to separate from *idolatry*; from *the world which lieth in wickedness*; from *the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth*; from fellowship with men of any sort *in their sins*, are indeed abundant, plain, and peremptory. But a commandment for one believer whose conversation is as becometh the gospel, to refuse communion with another; for one church of the Lord Jesus to refuse commu-

nion with another; such a commandment is not in the Bible, nor any thing like it. The commandments of Christ, as has been proved above, are all of a contrary complexion. He does not *enjoin*, he *forbids* such a refusal.

The passage from 2 Thess. iii. 6, *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which ye received of us*, has met with peculiar hardships. Modern separatists plead it as a direct warrant for their separation; and they may all plead it with equal propriety. In the primitive church, however, it was quoted the other way; *against* the separatists; and quoted as being decisive for their condemnation. Not they who *held*, but they who *declined* to hold communion with other Christians and churches, were branded as the “disorderly brethren.” Both interpretations cannot be right, although both may be wrong. And it would be somewhat amusing, yet a little melancholy, if the text instead of being on both sides, should after all be on neither. Let us see.

The word rendered “disorderly,” and its relatives, occur but four times in the New Testament, and three of them are in this chapter. They describe the character and

conduct of certain professors who availed themselves of the church's bounty to live in idleness, and employed their leisure in disturbing their neighbors. Thus Paul has explained his own meaning, v. 11. *For we hear, says he, that there are some which walk DISORDERLY among you : WORKING NOT AT ALL, but are BUSY-BODIES.* This he resented as a reproach to the Christian calling ; adding, v. 12. *“ Now them that are such, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they WORK, and eat THEIR OWN BREAD.”* And by way of stimulating them to honest industry, he reminds the Thessalonians of an order he had passed when he was with them, viz. that no lazy professor of religion should receive any support from the public charity : which is the import of the “ command,” that *if any would not WORK, neither should he EAT.*

From such “ disorderly” persons the Thessalonians were charged to “ withdraw ;” and the duty of Christians in similar cases, is still the same. But how ?

The charge was addressed to the Thessalonians either in their public or their private character ; either as a church, or as individuals. If the former, it is a charge to have no church-communion with the offender ; if the latter,

to discountenance him by avoiding personal intimacy.

That it is not the former ; i. e. not a charge to withhold church-communion seems clear, for the following reasons :

1st. The *terms* are entirely different from those which the scripture elsewhere uses in regard to church-fellowship.

2d. A church, in her collective capacity, does not *withdraw herself* from communion with an offender ; she authoritatively *puts him away* from *her* communion. 1 Cor. v. 13.

3d. The “withdrawing,” here enjoined, was to be a means of bringing the disorderly brother to a sense of his misbehavior, and a compliance with the Apostle’s mandate for abandoning his idle and impertinent habits : in case of disobedience, he was to be *reported* to the Apostle for ulterior judgment : and, in the meantime his brethren were to “have no company with him.” v. 14. Therefore he was still in communion.

4th. Even after this “withdrawing,” this “reporting,” this “having no company with him,” he was “not to be accounted as an enemy, but to be admonished as a brother.”

The alternative is, that Paul speaks of private and familiar intercourse. His terms apply to this exactly—The word rendered,

“have company,” is found but twice more in the New Testament, it is both times in his own writings, and both times in that sense. He is, then, directing the Thessalonian Christians how to vindicate the worthy name whereby they were called, in their private carriage toward the “disorderly brother;” with a view to prevent the necessity of more coercive measures. They were to show their disapprobation and grief by a reserve and distance, marking a strong contrast with the usual open, frank, and affectionate character of Christian society. This was a gentle, and delicate, but plain and pungent reproof; calculated to sting a man of any ingenuous feeling to the very heart.

They were to press upon him the Apostolic injunction; and to observe whether or not, when seconded by their own example and carriage, it was likely to produce any good effect.

If he resisted these milder proceedings, they were to decline his company altogether; but to leave with his conscience a friendly and faithful admonition of his sin, of his disgrace, and of his peril; that, if possible, he might be brought to an honest shame, and a complete reformation.

See how careful and cautious the great

Apostle was in everything affecting either the glory of his master, or the feelings and privileges of his fellow Christians. He knew, on the one hand, no compromise with sin; but, on the other, he knew nothing of that summary process of suspension and excommunication by which it has been fashionable in some churches both to indulge the lust of the lash, and to get rid of further trouble with offending members.

See also, how he has taught Christians in their private capacity to maintain the dignity of their profession; to be ministers of purity to each other; and to aid in supporting the order of the house of God.

But how does all this enjoin or justify our refusing the fellowship of Christians whom we own as "brethren in the Lord;" and of churches which we own as having his truth? The scripture has said "Withdraw from thriftless, meddling, mischief-making religionists;" *therefore*, my "beloved brother;" *therefore*, respected churches of Jesus Christ, whosoever and whatsoever ye be that go not under *my* sectarian name; I can have no communion with *you*!! Who that pretends to reason, will so gamble with his own understanding; who that pretends to love, can so slander his

own heart, as to adopt such a monstrous “*therefore?*”

But we have not yet done. The objection dies hard. It has been, it is, and will be insisted on, that the *principle* of Paul’s decision is general; and there is as good reason for “withdrawing” from a *church*, as from “a brother that walketh disorderly.” Agreed. But you are no nearer your point than before. Because we are not to have intercourse with a church that “walks disorderly,” does it follow that we are to hold no communion with any church or church-members, but our *own*? with any that have defects and blemishes? This inference is as monstrous as the other. It is very certain that Paul did not thus understand himself: For both his doctrine and practice, as every page of his history shows, were of a different sort. Did he say to the Christians of his time, “the churches of Corinth, of Rome, of Galatia are ‘disorderly;’ and you must have no communion with them or with their members?” No such thing. Yet *we*, directly in the face of Apostolic principle and precedent, *we* seize upon an ungracious term; we apply it without ceremony to the churches around; and then shelter our sects and our schisms under the authority of the scripture! We do in effect say, that the Lord

Jesus has commanded his people to break up his church into shreds and fragments; and to have no communion with each other; upon the pretext, alike convenient for them all, that they “walk disorderly!”

But have we well considered what we are doing when we brand a Christian or a Christian church as *disorderly*? Have we weighed the sense, have we measured the opprobrium, of that epithet? Have we remembered that as used by the Apostle it marks a character utterly inconsistent with the power of true religion? a character which dishonors the name of the Lord Jesus? And are we prepared to judge thus of all the Christians and churches whose communion we shun?

Unveil thy face, O TRUTH, lift up thy voice, and shake thy hand! Not the law of God; not spiritual interpretation; not the spirit of brotherly-kindness; but Ignorance, but Jealousy, but Vanity, but Passion, but Pride, occupy the seat of Judgment, and fulminate the charge, “*Disorderly*,” against individuals and churches in whom the “Refiner’s fire” may find less dross to “purge away” than in their self-pleased accusers. Here is the mischief. Every one accounts *that* to be *order* which he has himself been accustomed to practice: and

whoever does not move precisely in *his* track, “walks disorderly.”

The question concerning a church, in order to communion, ought to be, “What is her *substantial* character? Has she the truth, the ordinances, the Spirit, of Christ? Does she own “the Head,” and the Head own her? Then, whatever be her failings, I too will own her. I shall condemn them, lament them, pray over them, and bear with them. I will not quarrel with her about forms, about ceremonies, about any of those points in which our disagreement does not prevent us from being one in our Lord Jesus Christ. For the sake of that transcendent common interest I will walk with her in love and fellowship.” And thus it was once. But all is reversed now.

The question is no longer about *substance*, but about *accident*; not about those vital principles and virtues which constitute the solid glory of a church, and are the seal of God’s own Spirit; but about imperfections which yet do neither destroy their being, nor hinder their predominance: and especially about those things in which she differs from our own *peculiarities*. Here is the huge stumbling-block—the inexpressible transgression. One of our churches breaks her sacramental bread in company with a sister-church, where the

“Spirit of grace” sheds down his holiest influence—where the gospel “has a free course and is glorified;” where the “image of the **FIRST-BORN**,” throws its radiance around; and “love of the brethren” flows from heart to heart, till the swelling tide burst forth in streams of hallowed transport; and the scene compels that reverential testimony, “How venerable is this place! Surely this is none other than the house of God! and this is the gate of Heaven!” But with whom has she taken this ‘sweet counsel.’ Do they follow *us*?” “Alas, no! they only follow Christ!” The charm is dissolved—They are a “disorderly” church: Their communion is foul! O my soul, how shall these things appear when God arises to judgment?

IV. It is contended, that free communion, “by giving public countenance to churches erroneous or corrupt, destroys the force, or at least shackles the freedom of a faithful testimony for Christ and his truth.”

If that public countenance which is given to a church by communion with her, were of course a public countenance to her errors or corruptions, the objection would be unanswerable. For it would be with the worst imaginable grace that a man could remonstrate against sins which he openly encourages by

his own example. But such is not the fact, as was largely proved in the preceding article. And it is surprising that they who make the objection do not perceive that, like the former, it strikes, with double force, at communion with our own church so long as an error or corruption adheres to her. For if occasional and partial fellowship with a church is to shut the mouth, or diminish the boldness, of our testimony against her faults; much more will that be the effect of a fellowship complete and permanent. And so in its zeal for *pure* communion, this objection would banish *all* communion from the face of the earth!

But that the reply may be more direct and ample, let us strip the objection of its form and examine its substance—its principle. This manifestly is, that *friendship and intimacy are incompatible with proper admonition!* What say *Nature* and *Experience*? Who may, with the least hazard of displeasing, take the greatest liberty of expostulation and rebuke? One who treats me coldly, who avoids my company, and spurns an invitation to a meal in my house? or one who is kind, sociable, affectionate in his intercourse with me? There can be but one answer; and that answer is in every man's bosom. If you hope that I shall profit by your *reproofs*, you must

convince me of your *love*. I will listen with candor and submission to a friend who avails himself of his known regard for me to tell me my faults frankly, yet tenderly, with an evident concern for my improvement: while resentment, resistance, and recrimination will probably reward the officiousness which has no claim to such a freedom, and delights to mortify, if not to expose me. It is human nature, in the child and in the man—in the individual and in society: and all human experience attests it.

Nothing, therefore, could be more unfortunate than this objection. The very contrary is the truth. They who respect a church; who honor in her the ordinances of Jesus Christ, get an access to her confidence which will be denied to others. They acquire, by their affection, a right which she will concede, to point out wherein she “walks not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel:” and they are likely, in this way if at all, to be instrumental in doing her good. Acknowledge, commend, rejoice in, her excellencies; and you may speak to her freely, perhaps effectually, of her deficiencies.

Such a temper and treatment would, indeed, be irreconcilable with the notions, feelings, and conduct which are but too common.

They would put out of countenance those Pharisaical, nauseating panegyrics which many are so fond of lavishing upon “OUR CHURCH”—they would smother the noise of the brawler; would spoil the trade of ecclesiastical tale-bearers; would reduce to their proper insignificance the busybodies whom strife makes important; would absolutely strike dead those petty hostilities which irritated sectarians keep alive for the pleasure, one would suppose, of having something to fight about—but they would create a pause, a calm, in which might be heard the voice of that celestial “wisdom which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of compassion and of good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”

Let us lay aside disguise. The antipathies and collisions of evangelical churches form the most detestable warfare which the devil has contrived to kindle in our miserable world. And the worst of all is his success in persuading multitudes of honest men, that in carrying on the contest of their own sinful passions, they are “doing valliantly” for the cause of God. And that when, instead of admiring the general symmetry and healthful appearance of other Christian bodies, they are keen, vigilant, incessant, in looking for a freckle, a wart,

or a festering finger—when they open their ears to every slander—when they are extenuating all that is good in their neighbor, and magnifying all that is bad—when they are giving, with much satisfaction, shrewd hints that may leave a sting in his soul—when they are preaching at him, and praying at him; pouring out the gall of their animosity in the very presence of God, and before the throne of his grace—they are bearing *a faithful testimony for Christ and his truth!* Whether he shall himself so account of it, is another question.

This system has been tried long, and it never did any good yet. It has reformed none, convinced none, enlightened none. Let it be given up, and its opposite adopted. Let us show our fellow Christians that we embrace them in the bowels of Jesus Christ—that we do not consider “the children’s bread” on their table as “cast to the dogs.” And let us show it not by professions, but by fact—let us eat of their bread when they invite us; and welcome them, in turn, to eat of our own. One year of love will do more towards setting us mutually right where we are wrong, than a millenium of wrangling.

V. It is asserted, that “general communion among visible Christians will not only dimi-

nish the value, but impeach the propriety of all that service which, in every age, the churches of God have rendered to pure and undefiled religion by their judicial confessions of faith." More briefly thus; "Catholic communion subverts confessions of faith."

It would be marvellous indeed, if God's own people could not maintain a testimony for *him* without disunion among themselves! The whole corps of infidels put together is unable to produce so conclusive an argument against the Christian religion as a practical system. But let us take heed how we strengthen their hands by granting their assumptions—how we confound a testimony for God and his truth with a testimony for ourselves and our peculiarities. Were it so; were confessions of faith designed to be the shibboleths, the symbols, the flags, of religious, or rather *irreligious*, factions—challenges to battle among believers—wedges of dissension to split the church of Christ into pieces, the objection would be solid.

Admitting, however, the general unity of Christians in those things which immediately concern their common hope, it would prove, not that catholic communion is improper; but that confessions are what some represent them to be, mere nuisances: and, in that case, every

“son of peace” would labor for their destruction. But if they are intended, as indeed, they are, to proclaim wherein believers differ from the carnal world; and to be luminous rallying points of their strength and efforts in their conflict with the enemies of our Lord and of his Christ; it is inconceivable how they should interfere with the broadest Christian fellowship, or the broadest Christian fellowship with them. Even those particulars in which they might vary from each other, would but serve to set off in the finest and most consolatory manner, the superior worth and glory of their higher agreements; and furnish a suitable occasion for the exercise of that forbearance which is indispensable to “keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Certain it is that neither the Apostolic nor the Reformed churches found their confessions to be at war with their communion. The former studiously avoided, in their “symbols” of the faith, those inferior matters about which opinions and practice clashed then not less than now: wisely confining their testimony to the substantial truths of revelation; and turning their united forces against those substantial heresies which, by sapping the foundations of the common salvation, aimed at the overthrow of the common interest.

The multiplied and essential corruptions of Popery called for corresponding confessions in the Reformed churches. But these, instead of putting them asunder, brought them together; and were the very ground of their confidence, communion, and co-operation. The *Lutheran* church formed an unhappy exception: and even that exception would not have existed, had the spirit of her illustrious founder continued to pervade her councils.

On this point many of my readers will be startled by what they will think a very strange assertion. It is, nevertheless, true; and is an induction from facts of which a number have been already detailed. It is, that the churches most sound in the faith, most correct in their order, most pure in their worship, were also the most liberal in their communion. Inquire at the mouth of history, who, from the dawn of the Reformation down to the Westminster Assembly, united the most faithful testimony to Christ with the most fervent charity to Christians? Who were most full in their confession of the truth, and most catholic in their views of church-communion? Her answer is, They were the *Calvinists*—they were the *Presbyterians*!

But allowing the objection to have much greater weight than it has, when applied to

churches whose confessions do not perfectly harmonize, how is it applicable to those who are organized under *one and the same* confession? This is the case of several churches on both sides of the Atlantic, which yet have no inter-communion. *They* can surely make no use of it against each other.

Before we quit the subject of “confessions of faith,” it may be proper to notice a mistake, which is growing more and more prevalent, concerning their intention and use: I mean in their present amplitude. They are supposed, and in some instances, are declared, to contain *the terms of church-communion*; i. e. the terms upon which, and upon which alone, an individual can be admitted into church-fellowship. There are good reasons for doubting whether such an opinion is correct, and such a declaration discreet.

To prevent misconceptions, the author would observe, once for all, that no man is more thoroughly convinced than himself of the propriety, utility, and necessity of public confessions of faith; nor is less moved by the argumentations of their adversaries. But whether, like other good things, they are not liable to abuse; whether they have not actually been abused; and whether the application professed to be made of them, at this

moment, in some churches, is not an abuse, may be worth considering.

As the “fixed testimony of a church,” by which her principles are to be tried;” or as her “judicial expression of the sense in which she understands the Holy Scriptures in their relation to the Doctrine, Government, and Worship of the Christian church,” when these things are matters of controversy, it is difficult to conceive how a confession of her faith can be dispensed with. She must proclaim what she believes, and means to teach. This is her confession of faith; and is put into the hands of her officers to be by them inculcated and supported. Nothing can be more absurd than to employ as preachers and guardians of her religion, men who, for ought she knows, may labor to subvert the whole system which she is endeavoring to build up. She has, therefore, a right, and it is her duty, on the ground of self-preservation, as well as of fidelity to her king, to exact from them an explicit avowal of their belief on all those topics which more nearly or remotely affect the main interests of truth: and a positive, unequivocating engagement to maintain them. For this purpose she must bring them to a *test*: which can be done so effectually in no form as that of requiring an approbation of her confession. The secu-

rity is not indeed perfect: as some men will make any profession whatever for lucre, for distinction, or for convenience: and as the convictions of others may really alter. But it is the best which can be adopted. It keeps the recreant always within her grasp; and it is her own fault if, with such a control, she allows him to poison the “wells of salvation,” or to pollute their streams. In her confession of faith, then, are strictly and indispensably, her terms of *official* union.

But are these same terms to regulate *private* communion? When they go beyond the elementary doctrines of the gospel—when they are expanded into a comprehensive system of Theology, as in the Westminster Confession, ought they to be proposed for approbation, in all their latitude, to every one who desires baptism for his children, or a seat at the table of the Lord?

The reader is entreated not to be stumbled at an answer which may thwart his prepossessions; but to listen and reflect before he pronounces. The answer is, No.

1. Because such was not the *original design* of the Protestant confessions.

They were intended to raise and to display a banner for the truth of Christ which had been foully depraved, as by others, so espe-

cially by the Man of Sin. And while they contained all those cardinal points which are essential to Christian faith and fellowship; they contained others, which though not thus essential, are nevertheless important; and worthy to be maintained with zeal and constancy.

2. Because, being thus constructed, they were not *in fact* terms of communion for private Christians; nor even for the reciprocation of ministerial fellowship; as is plain—

From their absolute silence about such a requisition—

From the communion which subsisted among the members of the Reformed churches notwithstanding the slighter diversities in their creeds; and

From the endeavors of the best of them to effect, in addition to this communion, a complete union of the Protestant interests.

The Westminster Confession gives not the most distant hint of such a use. The church of Scotland, herself, as has been proved, never imposed it upon strangers; no, nor upon her own private members. “In so far,” says one of her professors of divinity, in a work expressly defending confessions of faith, “In so far as is known to us, there is no act of Assembly, nor even of any inferior church-judicature,

establishing the Confession of Faith a term of Christian communion, and requiring an assent thereto from Christian parents in order to their being admitted to all the privileges of church-communion, and particularly the baptism of their children." And again;

"As there is no established rule, nor any act of Assembly, confining the benefits of baptism to the belief of the several articles of our Confession, and excluding from a participation of this ordinance all persons who may in some things differ from us; so there was no ground in fact ever given to a person to complain of an arbitrary imposition upon him in this respect: Nor can any man, so far as we know, allege, that he acquainted a minister that he had scruples as to some articles of our Confession, or was of a contrary opinion to them; and, therefore, that he could neither profess his own belief of them, nor engage to educate his child in them, and thereupon was denied access to this sacrament. On the other hand, there have been several instances of persons who, upon their desire, were gratified in this particular; while none had ever reason to complain of a refusal." Such were the views and practice of the church of Scotland before the Secession.

3. Because they *cannot* be, in effect, terms of Christian communion.

You may *declare* them to be so : You may pass Synodical acts for that purpose. And thus the Westminster Confession of Faith, Catechisms, Form of Church-government, and Directories for worship, are *declaratively* and *legally* terms of permanent communion or membership in the Associate Reformed church. But declarations and acts of Synod cannot alter the nature of things ; nor make that to be practicable which in itself is impracticable. Not only the attainments, but the faculties of the mass of mankind must be different from what they ever have been before such extensive terms of communion can be enforced. It belongs not to church-power to “call things that be not as though they were.” Will a discreet man suppose that every plain Christian who knows enough for his salvation, and has learned to “glorify God in his body and his spirit,” can also be acquainted with the whole doctrine of those standards ? A work which occupied for years the care and study of a body of divines second to none in the world ? which has condensed the literature and labor of their lives ; and covers the whole ground of didactic and polemic Theology ? Is it a reasonable expectation that every plain

Christian, however unlettered, should be able to grasp a work like this? to distinguish its numerous propositions; and to fathom their sense? How many private members of our churches, our best and most exemplary members, could abide such an ordeal? Speculative zeal, which is always for carrying matters with a high hand, and is never more confident than when most in the wrong, may shut her eyes and stop her ears—but the practical understanding revolts. Conscience and common sense, when they come into contact with facts, have always flinched from the fair application of such theoretical tests. I say *theoretical* tests; for in the case before us they are not carried into effect by their most strenuous advocates. When a common person offers them his name as a disciple of Jesus Christ, do they so much as *pretend* to measure his knowledge by the height, and depth, and length, and breadth, of their public standards? They do not; not a man of them. If they did, and were to reject the deficient, they might resign their houses of worship to the bats at once. There would be no place for one Christian in ten thousand. And were their example universal, not a church of God would be left standing from the rising to the setting sun. They act very differently, and far more wisely. They receive

their members upon a credible profession of faith in Christ ; and in their inquiries into this profession, they *never* go into the *details* of their own standards. Those truths which they distinctly propose, and of which they require a confession, are, then, their *real* and their *only* practical test : and be it what it may, larger or less, they do and must, in their administration of the ordinances, naturally and necessarily cut down their standards to that size.

Therefore, sacramental communion on those vital principles which characterize the people of God in every age and country, is not inconsistent with the most perfect confessions of faith ; nor does it all interfere with their proper use.

VI. It is alleged that “as communion presupposes, and is founded upon, union ; it is a contradiction to hold communion with churches with which we are not united : and, therefore, all such communion is inconsistent with distinct ecclesiastical organization.”

The premises are granted : the conclusions denied. Communion is indisputably an act and expression of union. And it is on this very ground that the reciprocal communion of Christians and Christian churches is asserted to be both their privilege and duty. They *are* united ; they are *one*. They are one in inter-

ests infinitely more valuable, they are united in bonds infinitely more strong, than all the other interests which subdivide them ; and all the other bonds which unite their subdivisions. For *sectarian* communion you must indeed be united in a *sect* ; for *Christian* communion, you must be united in *Christ*. Therefore, according to the objection itself, if unity of sect be a sufficient reason for all sectarian communion, unity in Christ is a sufficient reason for all Christian communion. This is *our* plea ; and we cannot be grieved at hearing it from the mouth of an opponent.

But the objection goes further, and maintains that sections of the one church of Christ cannot hold lawful communion with each other, unless they be also united in one external denomination. Do they, who argue thus, perceive that they assume the non-existence of the *ONE* church of Christ ? an entire change in the nature of church fellowship ? and the extinction of Christian character and right out of the limits of a particular sect ? Upon no other basis can the conclusion rest, that formal union of sects in one and the same organical body, is essential to their Christian fellowship. Were it so indeed, the hand which guides this pen would account itself superlatively honored in putting the match to a train which should

explode under their ramparts and citadels, and so break and shatter and disperse them, that every trace of their existence should disappear from under heaven.

But the fallacy is palpable.

To say that communion is the fruit of union ; and thence to argue, that something *more* than Christian union is necessary to Christian communion, is a sophism which can mislead no one who permits himself to think.

Why does not the objector carry his doctrine through, and maintain that communion between members of different congregations is inconsistent with their distinct organization ? and that before it can be proper, they must all be melted down into one congregation ? If you say that “they are limbs of one larger body, and in virtue of this their union have, and are bound to have, communion with each other ;” I take my answer from your own lips, in your own words, and reply, that “the different Christian churches are limbs of that one larger body, the church-catholic ; and in virtue of this their union are bound to have communion with each other.” A single congregation ; an organized portion of a sect comprising several congregations ; the sect itself comprising several such portions, are all limbs in their places. That one limb is greater and another

less, cannot alter the nature of their relation to their bodies respectively. The principle is one; the analogy perfect; and the conclusion irresistible. This conclusion is, that to maintain the necessity of amalgamating different sects into one sect in order to communion between their members, is to maintain, at the same time, the necessity of amalgamating different congregations into one congregation, in order to communion between their members: And, that there is no argument for the communion of different congregations founded upon their union in one sect, which is not equally good for the communion of the sects themselves on account of their union in one church catholic.

Christian communion, therefore, may subsist in purity and power between different sections of the church-catholic, without any such union as the objection requires. However desirable such an union be in itself; and how extensively soever it shall be effected when "the Lord shall build up Zion and appear to men in his glory," there is room at least to doubt whether it would *now* be expedient were it even practicable. Practicable and expedient in some degree it probably is at the present hour; and is well worth the consideration of those who perceive "how good and how plea-

sant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” On a large scale the churches are not ripe for it. There are opinions, feelings, habits, which must be reduced much nearer than they are to some common standard, before it could be attempted without the danger of doing more harm than good. But this is no reason against the cultivation of friendly intercourse—against what may be called *church-hospitality*—against the most ungrudging fellowship in holy ordinances, as opportunity serves. They who should live very uncomfortably together under the same roof, may yet be excellent neighbors; firm friends; studious in the exchange of kind offices: and their civilities, in process of time, may improve in alliances of mutual benefit.

Under this head, viz. the necessity of union in *sect* as a basis of church-communion, there has been started a difficulty of so singular a cast, that one hardly knows whether to pass it by with a smile, or to give it a serious answer. The former is best merited; the latter more respectful.

It is said, then, that “by admitting to our fellowship persons who are not members of *our* church, we make an unjust and invidious distinction in their favor. Our own members being subjects of our discipline; the others not. So that we exact harder conditions of

communion from our own family than we do from strangers."

God has put his chastisements, whereof the discipline of his house administered for edification and not for destruction is a part, among the *privileges* of his people. Art thou not surprised, Christian reader, to hear it mentioned as an *hardship*? I see the blush mantling on thy cheek: and shall spare thee the pain of dwelling on so unseemly an imputation.

But there is a mistake. If by dishonoring their high vocation, your guests should deserve to be excluded from the communion of the faithful, what is to hinder their exclusion from yours? This would be decisive discipline, and as easily exercised towards them, as towards your own members. And whence arose the notion that an offending brother cannot be disciplined by any authority but that of the particular congregation or sect to which he more especially belongs? When he can be referred thither without much inconvenience, it is altogether preferable. But how did he *acquire* a right to transgress with impunity, and be from under the coercion of his Master's law, everywhere but within his own precincts? And when did the church-catholic *lose* the right of restraining a disorderly member by the agency of any one particular

church in which he may have enjoyed her communion? No man, whom she has once acknowledged, can free himself from his responsibility in any part of the world. A single act of communion in her peculiar mercies binds him as firmly to her authority as ten thousand. And there can be no reasonable doubt that an individual wearing and disgracing the Christian name, *provided his church-membership be ascertained*, may, according to the statutes of the Redeemer's kingdom, be called to account, reprov'd, excommunicated, by any Christian church on the spot where he happens to be, even *without an act of formal communion there*; much more than after such an act. Our confusion, perplexity, errors, weakness, unfaithfulness, on this and other great points of Christian order, we owe to our schisms: which, if they have not banished the doctrine, have nearly obliterated the sense, of the church's UNITY.

VII. It is objected that "whatever may have been the condition of primitive times," (in which *church-communion* was *Catholic-communion*,) "the state of the church is so greatly altered as to make the imitation of them inexpedient, if not impracticable, now."

That the imitation is not "impracticable," appears from the complaint against some

evangelical churches at New York and elsewhere—their offence consisting precisely in the fact of such imitation. That it is “inexpedient,” is thus far refuted by experience. No measure of more auspicious influence within its sphere was ever adopted. Ask the Christians immediately concerned.

To ground the impropriety of Catholic-communion upon the difference between the *present* and *primitive* state of the church, is either to betray lamentable ignorance ; or to convert sin into an argument for its own justification.

It has been demonstrated over and over, that there existed in the primitive, and even Apostolical church, causes of separation much more weighty than those which some denominations now assign for refusing the communion of others. Yet no separation took place : no communion was refused ; except by some who were held to be deserters from the “city of God,” and whose “memorial has perished with them.”

“But we *are* separated—we *are* broken up into a variety of sects—we have *ceased* from such catholic fellowship ; and our circumstances, in this view, are materially different from those of the primitive church.”

True : and the difference is your reproach ; your shame ; your crime. You have violated

the commandment of your Lord and Saviour ; you have conspired against the unity of his kingdom ; you have lacerated and mangled his glorious body ; you have slandered the spirit of his gospel ; you have given occasion to his enemies to blaspheme ; and you plead this unhallowed condition into which your disobedience has brought you, as a reason for *remaining* in it ! No, Sin shall not be its own apology. “ We have been *addicted* to falsehood, to knavery, to uncleanness ; therefore we may *continue* to be false, knavish, unclean,” is just as good an argument, and will go just as far at the tribunal of God, as, “ We have split ourselves up into sects ; we have kept away from our Lord’s table among his acknowledged disciples ; we have shut them out, in our turn, from his table among us ; therefore we must go on in our wonted course !” Must you indeed ? A rectified conscience would draw quite an opposite inference. It would teach you to say, “ The time past of our lives may suffice us to have lived in disunion, suspicion, and strife. Let us now ‘ search and try our ways,’ and endeavor henceforward to ‘ walk in love as Christ also hath loved us.’ ”

That there are obstacles to be surmounted in forming and executing so divine a purpose, is undeniable. But the greatest of them all is

the most sinful—the want of LOVE; and therefore the want of WILL. Remove *these*, and the rest will vanish almost of their own accord. So the primitive Christians found it: so did the Protestant Reformers: and so have others who cherished, though in a lower degree, their brotherly spirit.

The facts are numerous and stubborn; but the argument from them is evaded by a distinction which must briefly be examined. For it is said,

VIII. That “the sentiments and examples of holy men and evangelical churches in latter days, to which the friends of Catholic communion so confidently appeal, were adapted to *extraordinary circumstances*; and are inapplicable to a regular, settled state of the church.”

It is clear as the light, that if this distinction be unsound, its advocates cannot escape from the dilemma of either aspersing those whom they profess to honor, or convicting themselves of schismatical conduct. They ought to have been sure of their ground before they ventured upon it with so valuable a stake. Let us try whether it will bear their weight.

The first thing which strikes us is, that it should represent division, faction, rents, wranglings, as suited to an ordinary, regular, settled

state of the church! and should allow nothing but extraordinary circumstances to justify communion among her members of different denominations! That the fellowship of Christians and Christian churches with each other, as such, is disorderly and unlawful, except in *extraordinary circumstances!!* O Saviour, is such *thy* church, and *thy* law?

But “the legs of the lame are not equal.” If this distinction is just, what becomes of the plea on which our opposing brethren rest the chief merits of their cause, viz. that by communion with other churches than our own, or with their members, we partake of their sins?

That which is unlawful in itself can never be rendered lawful by circumstances. But all partaking of other men’s sins is unlawful in itself. Therefore, if Catholic communion involves such a participation, it is unlawful in itself, and cannot be justified by extraordinary circumstances. Upon this principle the communion of the Protestant churches was a communion in each other’s sin!! Which part will our brethren take? Will they give up their main argument against the intercommunion of acknowledged Christians? or will they lay so foul a charge at the door of those glorious men

who reformed the church of God at the expense of their heart's blood ?

But the Reformers themselves were of another mind. They put the lawfulness or unlawfulness, the propriety or impropriety, of church-communion, not upon the footing of ordinary or extraordinary circumstances, but upon the footing of the *common faith*. They did so in their public confessions, wherein they show what the church is, and ought to be, according to the Scriptures. They laid the foundations of her communion in her unity as the body of Christ. Their practice grew out of their *doctrine*, not out of their *circumstances*. They did not in one breath maintain the *unity* of the church ; in another, deny that unity to be a sufficient basis for the communion of her members : then, in the face of their own denial, actually hold such communion ; and, to crown all, justify their conduct by their extraordinary circumstances ! Such inconsistency, confusion, and contradiction, never disgraced the men whom the “ Spirit of judgment and of burning ” employed to purify the house of God. Their faith, their profession, and their example corresponded. What they believed they taught ; and what they taught they exemplified. Because they believed the

church of Christ to be one, their communion embraced her visible members.

One objection is left.—It is said,

IX. That “all Christians being one in spirit, the best ends of communion may be answered in their present state of separation, without the evils incident to its public extension.”

That believers have a spiritual fellowship with each other as living members of the one living body of Christ, is a truth not less full of consolation, than their outward distance and divisions are full of discomfort and shame. But how can this be a substitute for their visible fellowship in ordinances which are designed to display and promote it? A communion with the whole church not to be exemplified! a communion lawful and of high privilege, forbidden to be expressed in that form which the master appointed for the very purpose of expressing it! How is it to be kept up? If one Christian or church may thus commune with another, while the external evidence thereof is not only withheld but prohibited, so may another; so may a thousand others; so may all; and the visible church vanishes from among men! Nay, if the objection before us is of any weight or value whatever, it avails much more than its authors would be willing to accept. Carry it through;

turn Quakers at once ; discard your ministry and your sacraments ; fellowship in *spirit* will answer your best ends. And you will have no more trouble on the subject of church-communion.

PART IV.

It remains to trace the *consequences* of sectarian, as opposed to Catholic, communion.

These may be viewed in relations to ourselves—to the church of God at large—and to the surrounding world.

To Ourselves.

1st. The first and most obvious consequence is an utter *self-excision* or *excommunication* from all the rest of Christ's church upon earth.

That such is the fact, it would be illuminating the sun to prove. For if there be on earth Christian churches beside our own; and if we will have no communion with them, to what less does our conduct amount than an open renunciation of all visible concern with them in the kingdom of God? If, indeed, we do not hold them to be Christian churches; if we claim the *sole* possession of that blessed charac-

ter; and arrogate to ourselves the *exclusive* privilege of being the "General Assembly and Church of the First-Born," we may escape from the charge: But if we dare not proceed to such a fearful length, our escape is impossible.

Here then we are, in a state of excommunication: or, if you prefer the term, in a state of non-communion with the church of the living God. Isolated by our own act; under a practical, and in some instances a doctrinal, protest against fellowship with her in ordinances which we enjoy only as a part of the great whole. Yet with the "great whole," we as a part will have no intercourse—will have nothing to do. Is fellowship, then, with the acknowledged church of God; fellowship direct and avowed before angels and men, so vile in our eyes? Are we so lost to all sense of the beauty, efficacy, and glory of the "unity of the Spirit," as to be satisfied with our disunion? and so infatuated as to imagine that in fostering it we are "doing God service? Shall a church turn her back upon the whole visible interest of the Lord Jesus in the world, by refusing the "right hand of fellowship" to every portion of it but her own; and thus turn her back upon all the manifestations of his power, grace, love, faithfulness, which he there dis-

plays, and still hope for his blessing upon herself? hope for his presence, for his Spirit, for that holy “dew” under which she “shall grow as the lily, and cast forth her roots as Lebanon; her branches shall spread, and her beauty shall be as the olive tree, and her smell as Lebanon?” Has she a right in such a temper to hope for such things? Let the question be answered by them who have life enough left to tremble at that word of the Lord, “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

2d. Our sectarian communion stamps the brand of *inconsistency*, and throws an air of *insincerity*, upon our most solemn professions.

We *talk* of the Catholic church—of her *unity*—of her *character*—of her *prerogatives*; and yet *act* as if these were unmeaning terms; and all that we have to say of her, an “idle tale.” In *words* we found our title to our church-privileges in our union with her—in *deeds* we avoid every public, social expression of that union, as if it were our dishonor, and might prove to be our ruin. We laud her to the heavens in *theory*: we call her Christ’s spouse and our mother—in *practice* we shun

her embrace, her touch, her atmosphere *cane pejus et angue*; as if she were a rabid or venomous animal. There is not a room in God's house, a place in his temple, a province in his kingdom, fit for us to inhabit, or even to visit, but the one in which we have been accustomed to dwell. When we spread our table, we call it the *table of the Lord*. We invite *his* friends and prohibit *his* enemies, according to his own rules. But any who should imagine that we mean nothing more than we say—that our invitation is honestly intended for our master's friends; and, acceding to our own declared conditions, should take us at our word, would grievously mistake. They would find that not one in ten thousand of them that “love the Lord Jesus Christ,” and endeavor to “walk even as he also walked,” comes within our scope—that all our descriptions of *Christians* are only for Christians of *our sect*. Is this “simplicity and godly sincerity?” Are unbelieving eyes shut to the contradiction, or believing hearts untouched by the insult? Be fair at least. Come out openly and tell your hearers, that however your language may *sound*, you mean by the *people of God*, neither more nor less than the *members of your own church*! You startle; you recoil; you sicken. Why? Because the injustice is too

flagrant, the inconsistency too gross, to bear the light And shall we pertinaciously *do*, under cover of a flimsy veil, that which we have not the courage so much as to *look at* when it stands before us with the veil stripped off?

3d. Upon the *individuals* of a sect, their restricted communion exerts an unhappy influence, with regard

To their religious intellect—

To their practical judgment—and

To the direction of their zeal.

Upon the religious *intellect* sectarian feelings and fellowship produce an effect analogous to that of the division of labor upon mechanical ingenuity. By concentrating its operations in a few points, or perhaps in a single one, they render it peculiarly acute and discriminating within those limits, at the expense of enfeebling or destroying its general power. Conversations are cherished; books read; time expended; faculties employed; not for the purpose of acquiring larger views of the Redeemer's truth, grace, kingdom, and glory: but for the purpose of training more accurate disputants upon the heads of sectarian collision. Here men distinguish themselves; here they shine; here they gratify their *vanity*, which they often mistake for their *conscience*: "What

difference," exclaimed a zealous member of a nameless judicatory, when he was contending for a 'testimony' over and above the recognized confession of faith, "what difference will there be between you and the General Assembly, if you have not a *testimony*?" Such an exclamation from the mouth of a man otherwise reasonable and judicious, is a volume. It shows how the *party-soul* is narrowed down: and how all its perceptions are directed to those things which put Christians asunder, instead of those things which should bring them together; and which, for their importance, may not, without degradation, be *named* in company with the causes of their disunion. With one, the watch-word is "our excellent, our apostolical church;" with another," "the mode of baptism;" with a third, "the solemn league and covenant;" with a fourth, "the Burgess oath;" with a fifth, "psalmody." Upon these subjects, and such as these, their respective partisans collect their information and their strength; they whet each other till they become "as sharp as a needle." A stranger, hearing them talk on their favorite topics, would be astonished at their understanding and answers. But lead them away from their peculiarities to those things which concern the kingdom of God;

which are *common* to the household of faith ; which require a *general* Christian mind ; and how lamentable, for the most part, is the falling off ! “ We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.” And here is the explanation of that ordinary phenomenon, that the rise of party sense is the fall of sacred knowledge. Sectarian fires put out Christian light.

Nor does the *practical judgment* suffer less. This is clearly seen in the estimate which animated sectarians form of character. The good qualities of their own adherent they readily perceive, admire, and extol. His failings they endure with patience ; and his faults, which they dare not justify, they can overlook and extenuate. But should he quit *their* connection, the first are disparaged, the second are no longer tolerable, and the third swell into crimes. On the other hand ; Virtues and graces in a different party they are apt to admit with reluctance ; and rarely without qualification. It shall go hard if some “ dead fly ” do not taint the “ good ointment ; ” if some scrupulous “ but,” some “ fear,” some “ wish,” do not insinuate a *doubt* where there is no room for *denial* ; and relieve them from the pain, by throwing a cloud over the lustre, of excellencies not their own. But lo ! all is

altered ! The light which only dazzled, grows suddenly mild and cheering ! Our breasts fill with the “milk of human kindness ;” and we welcome to our hearts the very man whom a week before we eyed askant, and should have thought to be a “spot in our feast of charity !” Nay, we often are summarily convinced that a person of dubious character has been injured and persecuted. Our inquiries are conducted with the nicest delicacy. So gentle our temper ! so charitable our constructions ! so large our allowance for infirmity ! so deep our sympathy ! Whence the miracle ? Has a seraph, with fire from the altar of God, touched these men of unclean lips, and taken away the stains which alarmed our purity ? Oh no ! they are precisely what they were. Wherefore, then, this change in eye-sight, in feelings, in behavior ? Simple inquirer, thou knowest nothing of party-magic ! They have come, or are coming, or are expected to come over to US.

With such a perversion of the judgment it is impossible that *zeal* should be well directed, either in the choice of its objects, or in the mode of attaining them. The memory of an observer who only glances over the scenes which pass before him can furnish many examples of passions excited, principles sacrificed,

and efforts wasted, for the sake of party-baubles ; while interests of primary importance to the glory of earth and heaven are neglected or thrust aside. It is inconsistent with the nature of our faculties and affections to pursue great and little things with equal ardor. He who is occupied with the little, cannot rise to the great. He who rises to the great, cannot sink down to the little. A candidate for empire will not fight for toys. He who can fight for toys is unfit for empire. The man of "broad phylacteries" will give himself no trouble about the "robe of righteousness ;" the self-applauding "tither of mint and anise and cummin," has not room in his soul for "judgment and mercy and faith." Therefore it happens, that in proportion as the spirit of sect gets into a church, the spirit of the gospel goes out. Anxiety about her peculiarities becomes a substitute for the power of personal religion. The noisy champion of her pre-eminence, the proud observer of her ritual, will be a singular exception to a general rule, if he do not contribute little to the prosperity, and less to the ornament, of the church of God. A sanctimonious child of tradition, who counts it a mortal sin to eat flesh on Friday, and dispenses with any precept of the decalogue that stands in the way of his gratification, is not an

absolute rarity. The furious advocate, and the furious enemy, of a liturgy, are in danger of being alike estranged from the worship of God “in spirit and in truth.” Nor is it a chimerical fear, that in the hot contentions about psalmody, which have distracted and disgraced some of the American churches, the praises of both parties, may at times, have died away without “entering into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” It is a terrifying truth that living godliness languishes and decays in some of the “most straitest sects of our religion,” their own members being judges; and is succeeded by hard-faced formality. So that the complaint uttered more than a century ago by the venerable *Owen*, is not inapplicable now. “Whilst men have contended about ordinances and institutions, forms and ways of religion, they have grown careless and regardless, as unto personal holy conversation, to their ruin. They have seemed *like keepers of a vineyard, but their own vineyard they have not kept*. How many have we seen withering away into a dry, sapless frame, under a hot, contending, disputing spirit about ways and differences of worship? Whilst they have been intent on one part of profession, the other of more importance hath been neglected.”

This witness is true. And what is yet worse,

with such confessions from time to time on their lips, they proceed in the very same course ; and instead of awakening to a just sense of their sin and folly, they “ love to have it so ;” and hold as their enemies, and as the enemies of good order, all who endeavor to cease from their “ janglings ;” and who, laying greater stress upon the bond of their union in him, than upon the party-colored thread of ecclesiastical faction, stretch out the hand of fellowship to them “ who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” “ This is a lamentation ; and shall be for a lamentation.”

II. Upon the *church at large* the system of sectarian fellowship operates with a most baneful power.

1. It is a practical rejection of her *unity*. How she can be *one*, and yet sundered into a thousand pieces—how her parts constitute a beautiful harmonious *whole*, while they are allowed to have no more visible conjunction than if they were destitute of all affinity, is a paradox beyond comprehension. To cut a man off, by excommunication, from the whole church, supposes her to be one : Then to refuse him, while he retains his standing, the benefits of communion with the whole, supposes her not to be one. Again, to admit him, professedly, into that communion, and preclude

him from the use of it except in a little corner. is at once to admit and to deny *her* unity, and to play the robber with *his* privileges : mocking him with sonorous titles which mean nothing. And to make unity of *sect* necessary to communion in the *church*, is to take her fellowship off from the basis on which her Master laid it, her *Catholic unity* ; and to rest it upon a basis of our own making, directly the contrary to his, viz. her *schisms* ; i. e. to found all her actual communion in the principle of her *disunion*. In the mouths of men who behave thus, what intelligible sense can be annexed to the phrase, “ *unity of the church* ? ”

2. Sectarian communion breaks up the *charity* which ought to subsist between all the members of the body of Christ—

In their mutual benevolence :

In their sense of a common interest :

In the support which each should receive from the other : and

In their co-operation to promote the kingdom of God.

1st. The restricted communion of sects is incompatible with their *mutual benevolence*.

It is not in the nature of things that men should avoid each others company ; should strive pertinaciously for the mastery ; should put upon each other marks of public dishonor ;

and yet their “brotherly love continue.” The most amicable controversies are dangerous. They seldom end as they begin. An argument between friends is prone to gender animosity : and if they separate with excited feelings, alienation and enmity too frequently follow. It is so with collective bodies. When they are once apart, they gradually recede further and further from each other. New points of discrepancy arise ; create new subjects of contention ; open new sources of crimination ; gather new faggots for the flame of party-passions ; present new obstacles to concord—and thus deface the fairest feature of Christianity—“love to the brethren.” How sadly this has been verified needs no proof. “This,” saith Dr. *Owen*, “is that whereon the Lord Christ hath laid the weight of the manifestation of his glory in the world : namely, the love that is among his disciples ; which was foretold as the peculiar glory of his rule and kingdom. But there are only a few footsteps now left of it in the visible church ; some marks only, that there it hath been, and dwelt of old. It is, as unto its lustre and splendor, retired to Heaven ; abiding in its power and efficacious exercise only in some corners of the earth, and secret retirements. *Envy, Wrath, Selfishness, Love of the World*, with *Coldness* in

all the concerns of religion, have possessed the place of it. And in vain shall men wrangle and contend about their differences in opinion, faith, and worship, pretending to design the advancement of religion by imposing their persuasions on others: Unless this holy love be again re-introduced among all them who profess the name of Christ, all the concerns of religion will more and more run into ruin."

One would imagine that churches of the present day had been sitting for their picture to this great master of moral painting. Yet, with thankfulness to the God of peace, the likeness must be acknowledged to be less striking than it was some few years since; although too exact, even now, to be disputed as if it were not drawn from life with the pencil of truth.

One very remarkable circumstance here deserves our notice. Kind affections between churches and their members have decreased in the midst of eulogies upon the grace of love; cogent arguments on its importance; and pathetic persuasives to its exercise. How has this happened? "The plain reason of it is, because the love which men so contend for, is confined to that practice in and of *ecclesiastical communion*, whose measures they have fixed to themselves. If you will do thus and

thus ; go in such or such ways ; so or so far ; leave off such ways of fellowship in the gospel as you have embraced, and think according unto the mind of God, *then you have love*, else you have none at all. How little either *unity* or *love* hath been promoted by such principles and practices, is now evident : yea, how much divisions, animosities, and mutual alienations of minds and affections have been increased by them.” Thus the fever of sectarian zeal has weakened the strength, and chilled the warmth of catholic charity.

2d. The same restricting zeal tends to expel from the churches a *sense of their common interest*.

“ *My church ;* ” “ *your church ;* ” “ *his church,* ” are so incorporated with our habits of thinking and acting, as to make us nearly forget they are all members of one and the same church of God. Hence we feel but little concern in each other’s welfare. The inspired rule has hardly any more place in our feelings. “ Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.” Their sufferings and their joys are their own : we sympathize with them in neither the one nor the other. Where is the instance of a church rejoicing that the “ word of the Lord has free

course and is glorified " in another ? Do they not rather rejoice in each other's hurt ? Do they not seize, with evident satisfaction and avidity, upon those blemishes which provide matter for censure, and give a plausible color to comparisons ? Are they not often eager to draw members away from sister churches ? Do they not betray *complacency* in accessions which build themselves up at the expense of pulling the others down ? Do they not view and represent their increase by such means, as a proof that religion is flourishing ? *Their* church has indeed gained : But what is gained by the *church of Christ* ? Alas ! this is a question which they who " bite and devour one another," are seldom at the trouble of asking. And it is because their king is " God, and not man," that they are not utterly " consumed one of another."

3d. When churches lose the sense of their common interest, they withhold from each other that *support* which it is their duty, and might otherwise be their inclination, to yield.

Each leaves the other to stand or fall by herself. The invasions of an adversary upon one, make little impression upon the rest. They all doze in security, provided an attack be not directly against their own possessions. They see errors spreading, mischiefs growing,

which their timely interposition might contribute to arrest ; and it would not be wanting were the case formally their own : but as matters are, “ it is none of their business.” They stand by and let the ruin work, till it be too late ; and then console themselves with bearing their “ testimony ” against evils which they might have prevented. Have they forgotten that in spiritual as in temporal life,

tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet ?

“ your own house is in danger when your neighbor’s wall is on fire ? ” or do they imagine that the HOLY ONE is to be put off with such negligent and selfish loyalty ?

They also decline to bear one another’s burdens : at least they do so to an extent which infringes upon every principle of their relation as parts of a great whole. The good things of this world, where there is no sort of lack, must be dealt out, if at all, with a hand unusually sparing to those who are not of “ our church.” I am far from insinuating that the opulent do justice to their means or their professions *within* the boundaries of their own sect. There is no duty in which, even thus narrowed, they are more generally, more sinfully, and more shamefully, deficient : and that they shall find, many of them to their eternal

cost, when God shall make them feel that they were only *stewards*, not *proprietors*, of their substance ; and shall arraign them at his bar as robbers of his treasury. But little as they might do in any case, they do still less than they would if the claims of Christ were always backed by the claims of sect. And thus an affluent Christian district permits a poorer one to pine and languish through the want of aid which it could most conveniently afford. If the history of early believers, in the *Acts of the Apostles*, may be credited, “from the beginning it was not so.”

Their restricted communion, moreover, teaches different sects to *dishonor each other's Christian character*. Insomuch that the most ample recommendations from one will not procure admission to church-privileges in another ; and the mere desire to go, upon whatever grounds, from one to another, shall deprive a person of every official document of his life and conversation ; let it have been ever so exemplary and edifying. Not a certificate of ecclesiastical standing shall be given ; though most respectfully asked : and a Christian on whom there has not lighted the breath of accusation, shall be turned adrift, like a religious vagabond, to sue for the courtesy of any church that may please to take him in.

What is this, but to affront, in the face of the world, that particular church which he wishes to join, as though she were not of the “household of God;” and to treat him like an apostate simply for preferring to be under her immediate inspection ?

To so great a length is this temper indulged, as sometimes to corrupt *moral discipline* in the church where it prevails, and to counteract it in others where it does not. Who can think, without shuddering, of a man’s being called up as an *offender*, and being required, on the peril of *censure*, to confess his *sin*, and promise *amendment*, for—what, Christian reader, for what?—why—“tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon”—for *hearing* “the words of eternal life” from the mouth of an unquestioned ambassador of our King, who has not his credentials countersigned by US—more briefly—from a minister who is not of *our* party ! That *hearing* “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” in one of his own churches, should be accounted a *crime* and a *scandal* in another ! And that an attempt to remove from one to another, should subject his servants to the threat and the hazard of being thrown out of them all ! Did Paul ever expect it should come to this ?

Even this is not the whole. To avoid cen-

sure for misconduct, it is not a strange thing for some people to be seized with sudden fits of conscience, and get most opportune illuminations of understanding; to steal away to another church, then deny the jurisdiction they have deserted; set up for peculiar humility, zeal, and sanctity; and have their claims *admitted*, and be themselves received, by the churches to which they flee! Nay, persons under *actual censure for immorality*, have not found it impracticable nor difficult to shelter themselves in churches which most loudly accuse others of lukewarmness and laxity. They who hold themselves to be too pure for communion with their brethren, should not try to destroy what little vigor of discipline may be left, nor open their church-bosom as an asylum for fugitives from the law of God's house.

4th. The spirit of sect hinders the churches which it governs from *co-operating* together in promoting the kingdom of God.

In the United States, where, generally speaking, there is no legal provision for the maintenance of religion; and especially among the new settlements, there is frequently, in very small districts, a confluence of people from various denominations. Their junction makes a flourishing town, and would make a flourishing church. They agree in primary,

and disagree in secondary principles: But they will not, for the sake of the former, lay aside their contests about the latter. Collectively they are able to support the gospel in comfort and dignity; separately, they cannot support it at all. They will not compromise their smaller differences. Every one must have his own way; must be completely gratified in his predilections. The rest must come to *him*; he will neither go to *them*, nor meet them upon common ground: and the result is, that they all experience alike, “not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord.” Sanctuary they have none. They lose, by degrees, their anxiety for the institutions of Christ. Their feeble substitutes, their small social meetings, without the “ministers of grace,” soon die away. Their Sabbaths are Pagan; their children grow up in ignorance, in unbelief, and in vice. Their land, which smiles around them, like the garden of God, presents an unbroken scene of spiritual desolation. In the course of one or two generations, the knowledge of God is almost obliterated; the name of Jesus is a foreign sound; his salvation an occult science: and while plenty crowns their board, and health invigorates their bodies, the bread of life blesses not their table, and moral pesti-

lence is sweeping their souls into death. All this from the idolatry of "our" church. They might have had Christ at the expense of sect. They preferred sect, and they are without Christ. How far the mischief shall proceed, God only can tell. It is enough to fill our hearts with grief, and to shake them with terror, that from the combination of this with other causes, we have already a population of SOME MILLIONS of our own color, flesh and blood, nearly as destitute of evangelical mercies as the savage who yells on the banks of the *Missouri*.

When sectarian jealousy and pride lead professing Christians thus to sacrifice themselves and their children, it would be vain to look for their concurrence in generous efforts for the good of others.

How much yet remains to be done before "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea;" how much before it fill the corners of every Christian country, it would be superfluous to show. "Darkness covers the earth; and thick darkness the people." Millions after millions go down to the grave unacquainted with the "grace which bringeth salvation;" uncheered by the hope which conquers death. If the world receive the knowledge of "the only

true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent," they must owe the blessing to those who already enjoy the "words of eternal life." If the banner of the cross ever wave triumphantly over the last battlements of idolatry, it must be planted by hands which have been washed in the blood of the cross. If the doctrines of kindness and peace shall humanize the habitations of cruelty, and subdue the sons of blood, they must flow from the lips of those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious." Here is a field large enough for their labors; an object worthy of their zeal. Here are conquests to be achieved infinitely more splendid than any which signalize the heroes of the sword; and a "recompense of reward" as far above their brightest honors, as the "crown of glory which fadeth not away," is better than the breath of a "man that shall die, and the son of man that shall become as grass." The enterprise is stupendous; the thought is awful. Yet awful and stupendous as they are, the thought is to be embodied in fact, the enterprise to be a matter of history. So saith the word of our God. And that Christians, were they *heartly* in the cause; half as hearty as they are in getting the "mammon of unrighteousness," are able to accomplish that word, does not permit a doubt. But for its

accomplishment there must be a union of counsels, of confidence, and of strength, unknown in the church since the days of Apostolic harmony. To such an union nothing can be more hostile than the spirit of sect. We do hail indeed, with an exultation not unworthy, we hope, of bosoms which have been touched by celestial fire, the auspicious dawns of such a day of love. The truly gracious efforts in which the land of our fathers, the island of Great Britain, has taken the lead; and keeps, and seems destined to keep, the pre-eminence, encourage us to anticipate things which many prophets and wise men have desired to see, and have not seen them. Eternal blessings on those children of the truth who have excited what may one day prove “a general movement of the church upon earth,” in order to “speak peace to the heathen!” Upon those benefactors of the nations, who have poured their offerings into the treasury of God, and have joined their hands with their opulence in the glorious work of sending the Bible, which teaches sinners what they “must do to be saved,” to “all peoples, and kindreds, and nations, and tongues”—upon those vigilant sons and daughters of charity, who have gone out into the “highways and hedges” of the country; into the

“streets and lanes” of the city, “to seek,” like their adorable Redeemer, “and to save that which was lost;” to bring the Sabbath, with its mercies, into the cabins of the poor, and the houses of the profane; and to train up, by labors worthy of the Lord’s day, for “glory, honor, and immortality,” those wretched outcasts who were candidates for infamy in this world, and for perdition in the next!

Whose heart does not swell with transport? Whose lips do not pour forth benedictions? Who that names the name of Christ can refuse his “God speed?” But what do these things involve, and how have they been accomplished? See it, O disciple of Jesus, and rejoice! They involve, they have been accomplished by *the prevalence of the CHRISTIAN over the SECTARIAN*! No such thing was attempted by modern believers; no such honors encircled their brow, till the “Sun of righteousness, arising upon them with healing in his wings,” melted their ices, warmed their soil, and made their sectarian “wilderness to blossom as the rose.”

Stronger proof of the baleful and blasting influence of sect on the “kingdom of God,” no man can ask, than the fact, now notorious to the whole world, that what has been thus ef-

fectured for the one, has been done at the expense of the other. If he wishes for confirmation, let him cast his eyes around. Let him see in the caution, the management, the address, which Christians of a Catholic spirit are obliged to employ ; in the slanders which, though refuted on the spot, and put to deeper and deeper shame by every moment of experience, still rear their front and maintain their hardihood ; in the coldness, shyness, distance, of some Christian churches, who come not YET “to the help of the Lord against the mighty ;” let him see in these things how strong a rampart sectarianism throws up around the camp of the Devil ! Let him shiver with horror when he hears, not from lying Fame but from unvarnishing Verity, that whole denominations are to be found—denominations sound in the faith of Jesus, who are utterly unable to impart the gospel to perishing Pagans and Paganized Christians ; and who nevertheless, a few individuals excepted, will not lift a finger, will not contribute a farthing, towards enlightening their darkness ; because, forsooth, the candle cannot be carried in *their candlestick* ! What shall we, what *can* we say to such reluctance ? Does it admit of more than one interpretation ? viz. that they had rather these their poor fellow-sinners should sink down to

hell under the brand of the curse, than rise up to heaven with the “image and superscription” of the Son of God, unless *their own* name be entwined with *his* in the coronet of life? They mean not so: they think not so: they shrink and tremble at the very idea. Then it is time for them to examine by another standard than has regulated too many of their proceedings, whether their *deeds* have not said so; and whether justice to their best principles and affections does not require them to change their course!

III. We have yet to survey this sectarian fellowship from another point of view; its effects on the *surrounding world*.

1st. The first effect is visible, and has already been noticed. Many, who might have rejoiced in the light of life, had Christian churches been more concerned for the kingdom of God than for the predominance of party, are left to darkness and ruin. Let not the eager partizan who might have put forth his helping hand to save them from the pit, but would not, imagine that his negligence will be unnoticed when God “maketh inquisition for blood.” The eternal death of multitudes lies at the door of our unseemly strife.

2d. We hinder the success of the gospel where it is enjoyed even in purity.

With what face do we praise our religion as the religion of love, when we live, or behave as if we lived, in enmity? If the same jealousies, rivalships, antipathies, and other passions which reign among secular men, reign, or *appear* to reign, among us also, how shall we prove that we are better than they? What can we persuade them to think of the *church* but that she is their own *world* in disguise, and so much the worse for her claims to sanctity? If, without even the pretence of differing about essential truths, sect clash with sect as harshly and unkindly as any political factions whatever, how shall the one take precedence of the other in the scale of moral probity?

These inquiries are too natural not to rise in the mind of every reflecting man of the world. Have they no tendency to put him further and further from the faith of Jesus? to harden his heart against the gospel of immortality? to render its very terms designating moral character; such as "good conscience;" "spiritual-mindedness;" "self-denial;" "bearing the cross;" "following Christ," &c., suspicious if not odious in his eyes? Whence proceed his sneers, his ridicule, his flings of "hypocrisy,"

“fanaticism,” “priestcraft,” and the other contemptuous phrases with which his vocabulary is so plentifully stocked? “From the enmity of his depraved heart,” you will say, “because the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” Doubtless. But is there no stimulus to his enmity in the scandalous spectacle of those who profess “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope of their calling,” playing the Jew and the Samaritan toward each other?—without communion, without confidence, without religious “dealings” together; alienated, sundered, opposed, as if their title to heaven were founded in their mutual hostility? Do not these things cause him to err, and turn the Rock of salvation into “a stone of stumbling and rock of offence?” Do they not avert his eye from the beauty of Zion; stop his ears against the eulogy of her converts; and put into his mouth that bitter and biting taunt, “These Christians have just religion enough to hate one another heartily?”

Shall we wonder at his mistake? How should *he* recognize believers in the Lord Jesus, if they do not seem to recognize each other? For in very deed, sectarians are Christians in disguise. The sectarian stands foremost, the Christian behind. Sectarian dis-

tinctions are masks: sectarian champions, ecclesiastical knights covered with their armor, themselves unseen. The masks are of all hues and all features. They must be removed before you can perceive that the combatants are of one species. Sectarianism stripped off, you see the Christians. You discover the identity of race—the family features—those beautiful features in which they resemble their Father who is in heaven; and are “conformed to the image of the first-born among many brethren.”

Blessed likeness! enchanting loveliness! Are the painted earth-made vizors which conceal “the human face divine,” and substitute, in its room, their own deformed and forbidding visages, worth the price they cost us? worth the conflicts which have all the pains of military warfare without its recompense? and all the hardihood of chivalry without its generosity? worth the broken unity, the blighted peace, the tarnished beauty, the prostrate energy, the humbled honor, of the church of God? Ah no! Our hearts *feel* that they are not. What then remains but to lay aside our petty contests? to strike our hands in a covenant of love—a “holy league,” offensive and defensive for the common Christianity—to present our consolidated front to the legions of error

and death ; and march on, under the command and conduct of the Captain of our salvation, till the nations mingle their shouts in that thundering *Alleluia*—"The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth !"

LETTERS

ON

FREQUENT COMMUNION:

ADDRESSED ORIGINALLY TO THE

MEMBERS

OF THE ASSOCIATE-REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA.

1798.

LETTERS
ON
FREQUENT COMMUNION

LETTER I.

Introduction.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

WE should greatly undervalue our spiritual mercies, were we insensible that “the lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea, that we have a goodly heritage.” The unadulterated faith once delivered to the saints; that religious polity which Christ hath instituted for his Church; and a worship, on the whole, scriptural; are benefits which God bestowed on our fathers, and which by his grace they have transmitted unto us. To insure our peaceful enjoyment of them they

underwent no ordinary trials. It is the fruit of their labors, their tears, and their blood, which merit from their posterity an everlasting remembrance.

But, brethren, we should prove ourselves unworthy of such an ancestry, if, under the pretext of prizing *their* attainments, we become indifferent about our own; if we lose their spirit while we boast of their names: much more, if, falling short of their excellence, we do not endeavor to regain and surpass it. Magnanimous men! they not only cherished their light, but applied it to expose delusion, and to explore the paths of forgotten truth. Far from being satisfied with previous reformation, they inquired if any corruption had been retained, any error unnoticed, any duty overlooked; and exerted themselves to supply the defect, both by condemning what was wrong and by performing what was right. No favorite prepossessions, no inveterate habits, either appalled their courage or paralyzed their efforts. According to their knowledge they cheerfully sacrificed whatever is contrary to the simple and spiritual ordinations of their Lord. Accompanied herein with his blessing, they were eminently successful, and have left us an example which it is our glory to imitate. And we are to imitate it by comparing with

the scriptural pattern that branch of the church to which we belong, that we may discover whether there yet remains aught which needs correction. No opinion can be more dishonorable or dangerous than this, that reformation being already achieved, we have nothing to do but to tread quietly on in the track of precedent. Godliness is not the nursling of tradition. If we have no better reason for our sentiments and practice than that they were the sentiments and practice of our fathers before us, our religion is not a rational but a mechanical service. Christianity allows no implicit faith, except in the divine testimony. It is not enough that a point of doctrine or worship has the sanction of venerable names and ancient custom: these may command respect, but can neither obligate conscience nor relieve us from the trouble of examining for ourselves, because there is no believing by proxy. Like the Bereans, in whom the gospel excited a spirit of noble inquiry, we are to *search the scriptures* for the warrant both of our religious profession and our religious observances. We are charged to **PROVE** *all things*, and to **HOLD FAST** *that which is good*. The charge embraces not merely such things as we have not hitherto adopted, but whatever we already possess. “Try **ALL**,” saith the Holy Ghost, “hold fast

that which abides the trial, and let go the rest." And we shall answer, then, to our Master in heaven, we are bound to review our religious order and usages; and if we shall find them in any particular at variance with his appointments, thankfully to own our mistake and faithfully to amend it. No plea can justify our refusal; for whatever purity we may really enjoy, none of us have the vanity to claim an exemption from error, nor to suppose that the furnace of the sanctuary can detect no dross in our gold. A church may in her leading characters be sound and evangelical, and yet in some parts of her conduct go exceedingly astray.

The duty now recommended appears to be peculiarly seasonable and urgent.

1. We profess to be Jehovah's witnesses; to maintain his truths against corruption; and for this end to keep up a distinct communion. If we expect our testimony to make a desirable impression upon others, we should ascertain whether we ought not to begin with reformation at home. It will be superlative happiness, indeed, if we be able, after the conscientious discharge of this duty, to lift up our heads and say, we are clean. Let us not be too confident that such would be the issue; for,

2. A number of ourselves more than suspect, that, in one of the most interesting parts of public worship, we have deviated far from propriety. They see in our commemorations of the REDEEMER'S DEATH neither that *frequency* nor *simplicity* which were the delight and the ornament of primitive churches. In their estimation, the supper of the Lord is treated with a neglect which we would tremble to show towards any other of his institutions. Instead of pressing to it through every difficulty and with holy joy, we approach it in general as seldom as can at all consist with the decency of Christian profession. *Once* in *twelve* months, or *once* in *six*, is commonly deemed a sufficient remembrance of him "who loved us and gave himself for us."

They see, moreover, our sacramental feasts loaded with incumbrances for which they cannot discover any scriptural warrant, and that to these incumbrances is owing in a great measure the evil of which they complain.

These things they deplore: they are deeply convinced that the authority of the Lord Jesus; the purity of his ordinances; the very design of the holy supper; and the good of languishing Zion, require a speedy and an effectual remedy.

On this momentous topic do the following

letters, brethren, address you. They are intended to urge the great duty of frequent communicating; to sift the objections by which it is opposed; and to place in the light of truth some of those observances which obtain among us. However unworthy of their subject, they claim attention for their subject's sake. In the boldness of the gospel, they not only solicit but *demand* an impartial hearing. You owe it to yourselves, to the truth, to God. You owe it likewise to your brethren, who, against the torrent of prejudice, have adventured to put more marked honor upon the blessed JESUS by more frequent, and, as they conceive, more evangelical commemorations of his love, than have been usual. And if it shall appear that they are right; that we have been criminally remiss in celebrating that death which is the spring of every living hope; that all apologies for our neglect are lighter than vanity; and that any of our customs want the approbation of the HOLY GHOST, and really stand in the way of our obedience; the question will be decided with all who love Jesus Christ more than fashion, and they will unite in a reform as general as it will be glorious.

LETTER II.

Frequent Communion an Indispensable Duty.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

OUR obligation to keep the sacramental feast, is the dying command of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. *I have received of the Lord, saith the Apostle Paul, that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me."* After the same manner also, he took the cup when he had supped, saying, *"This cup is the New Testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till he come."*

This institute, being drawn up with some latitude, does not ascertain precisely, *how* often the supper is to be celebrated. Something is, no doubt, committed to Christian prudence. The situation of a church, or of her members,

may occasionally render communicating inexpedient, or even impracticable. By not restricting it to certain periods, which it would then be clearly sinful to omit, Christ has preserved his people from the embarrassments which incidental hindrances would otherwise have created.

But in providing for lawful impediment, he has given no sanction to carelessness. It would be a strange inference from the words of the Apostle, and a profligate abuse of gospel liberty, to conclude, that, as the Lord hath prescribed no *stated times* of communicating, we may innocently abstain as often and as long as we please. Some, indeed, appear to act upon this notion. Whether they communicate twice in a year, or once; or only every other year, is to them indifferent. But whoever justifies this irregularity from the indefinite terms of the institution, ought to reflect, that the same apology will justify a professor who should communicate but once in his whole life. With such carnal sophists, however, I have nothing to do. The real disciple who loves his Master, will not permit himself to shuffle. He will candidly confess, that the very phrascology of the text implies *frequency*. The words *as often*, occurring twice in two lines, can signify nothing less, if they signify

anything at all. Whence it follows, that frequent communicating is positively enjoined; and, consequently, that infrequent communion is a violation of the commandment which the Saviour delivered with his departing breath.

It may be asked, how are we to mark, in this case, the limit between duty and sin? Where does the one terminate, and the other commence? I answer, that the indefiniteness of the command will obviate the difficulty on the one hand; and fervent love to Christ on the other. There is little wisdom, and less tenderness, in anxiety to tread as near to forbidden ground as we possibly can, without crossing the boundary. This is perilous casuistry, as many of the godly have found to their cost. In an hour of worldly prudence, they have made experiments, with great safety, as they thought; but which issued in agony of conscience, and a broken heart. On the subject before us, as well as on every other which is liable to doubts, spiritual caution will teach us to remove from danger. But wherever the line be drawn, it is pretty evident that our ordinary practice lies far on the wrong side. Considering the *place* which the supper holds in the Christian life, and the *ease* with which it may be celebrated; it is a satire on language to call yearly or half-yearly commu-

nions, *frequent*. Every believer's heart will tell him so. And here, while meditating on the command *often* to show forth the Lord's death, he is entreated to ponder a few considerations which ought to awaken sensibility, and to influence conduct.

Although it cannot be disputed, that the very words of institution require frequent communion, yet their emphasis is mostly overlooked. An accurate inspection will convince us that they are more happily adapted to the nature and ends of the ordinance, than any other mode of expression; and contain an argument which should thrill our very souls. They hold out the memorial of Emmanuel's death, as a *test* not merely of *obedience* but of *love*; and the *frequency* of our acts of obedience as the *measure* of our love. *This do in remembrance of ME: For AS OFTEN as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, YE DO SHOW FORTH THE LORD'S DEATH.* As if he had said, "In this bread and wine, O my people, I leave you my memorial. Here is the symbol of my broken body, and here of my streaming blood. In my deepest sorrows you were not forgotten by me; and I require you to keep this feast as a proof that I am not forgotten by you. Realize, O my people, that it is **YOUR LORD'S DEATH** which ye show forth *every time* you eat this bread and drink this

wine. As ye love me I charge you; as I have loved you, I charge you; **THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.**”

Say, then, O thou whom JESUS hath delivered from the wrath to come, doth he not here fix a standard of thy gratitude to his grace? If thou art in this manner to testify thy remembrance of him, wilt thou not do it oftener, the more thou rememberest him? If this is the mean by which thou art to show forth his death, will not thy use of it be regulated by thy sense of thine obligations to his death? And does not the tenor of this command teach thee, that the *frequency* of thy sacramental commemorations of him will be in proportion to the *ardor* of thy love? Alas, brethren, if *this* is a criterion of love to our Lord, the pretensions of most of us are low indeed.

That the foregoing view of the Redeemer's precept is not erroneous, will be evident from a delineation of the principal features of his supper.

1. The sacrament of the supper is *an important part of our practical testimony to the cross.*

This holy ordinance contributes as much, if not more than any other, to keep alive in the earth the memory of that sacrifice which, through the eternal SPIRIT, our High Priest

offered up unto God. In a powerful appeal to the senses, it arrests attention, and strikes with awe, while the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary pass along in symbolical review. In this holy ordinance, we proclaim to the surrounding spectators, that we are not ashamed to confess the despised JESUS before a crooked and perverse generation. We proclaim to the carnal world, that we have renounced their master, their idols, their hope; and have “avouched the LORD to be our God.” We cry with the apostle, “God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.” This, indeed, is the only ordinance in which, *as* believers, we make a public, social, and separate confession of his name. In other services of the sanctuary, we are mingled with the crowd: our profession, though public and social, is not *separate*, and does not distinguish us from others. In the worship of a godly family at home, it is, indeed, social and separate, but not *public*. In holy baptism, it is separate, and public, but not *social*, or at most very imperfectly so. It is only in the supper of the Lord, that these three characters of the church’s practical confession completely unite. One humble commemoration of his death is a better testimony to his grace, and sinks a deeper con-

viction into the breasts of the profane, than years of empty profession, or angry controversy.

2. The supper is *an affecting representation of the communion which believers have with CHRIST JESUS.*

They appear at the sacramental table as members of a family of whom CHRIST is the head: the federal head by *legal*, and the spiritual head by *vital* union. This double relation establishes between them and their Lord a *common interest*, which is recognized and sealed in the holy supper. On the one hand, they, in worthily receiving the symbols of his body and blood, receive him by faith as a crucified Saviour, vow adherence to his cause, and claim the right of communicants in the benefits of his covenant. On the other hand, he accepts the vow and admits the claim, divinely sanctioning their title to all the blessings which he hath to confer. The peace of God, which passeth understanding; access to him as a reconciled Father; grace to help in every time of need; in a word, life, light, strength, consolation, victory; his presence, his Spirit, his fullness, his kingdom, his glory—all these he owns to be their portion; all these he promises to give them. So that the sacramental seal of their being “planted together in the likeness of his death,” be-

speaks, at the same time, the preparation and earnest of their being “planted also in the likeness of his resurrection.”

3. The supper exhibits the *union and communion of believers with each other in CHRIST.*

They are citizens of the New Jerusalem, enjoying equal privileges under a common charter—children of the same family, sitting down to a feast provided by paternal love. They do “all eat the same spiritual meat, and do all drink the same spiritual drink.” If there is aught in religion to make them feel that “they being many are *one* body ;” that they are the purchase of the same blood, and monuments of the same grace ; that they are combating in a common warfare, are partakers of a common salvation, and heirs of a common inheritance ; that they have one faith, one calling, one hope—it is the communion of the body and blood of the Lord. Thrice blessed ordinance ! which clothes spiritual principle with visible form, and repeats to the senses what the scripture hath solemnly addressed to the heart, that in the nations of the saved *there is neither Jew nor Greek ; there is neither bond nor free ; there is neither male nor female ; for they are all ONE in Christ Jesus.*

4. The death of Christ, commemorated in the supper, *is the point in which the leading doc-*

trines of redemption concentrate their rays, and where they shine with united lustre.

Draw nigh, O Christian, and by faith contemplate in the cross of Jesus *the infinite evil of sin*. Nothing less than a sacrifice of infinite value can procure its pardon. To expiate its guilt, God manifested in the flesh becomes a curse ; to wash away its stain, his precious blood is poured out. See in the agonies of Him who is JEHOVAH's fellow ; see in the sword of vengeance that cleaves his heart the accursed sinfulness of the sin which thou hast committed ; and which, without his interposition, would have sunk thee forever into the lowest hell !

Draw nigh, and contemplate the rigors of Jehovah's justice in the *punishment* of sin.

He hath sworn in his holiness, and by many infallible signs he hath demonstrated, that it shall not escape. The waters of his flood have swept from the earth a whole generation of rebels. Fire from heaven consumed the sinners of Sodom. Sword, and famine, and pestilence, have repeatedly avenged his quarrel. Nay, " the damnation of hell " is prepared for apostate angels and the impenitent among men. But neither the flood of waters nor the flood of fire ; nor famine, nor pestilence, nor sword ; nor that everlasting destruction from

his presence ; no, not even hell with all its terrors ; not any of these, not all of them combined, ascertain so dreadfully Jehovah's determination to punish sin, as his "not sparing his own Son." Oh how should *we* have supported the weight of that wrath, which bowed down to the earth and laid low in death the **WORD** incarnate !

Draw nigh, and contemplate *the richness of the Father's grace in our salvation.*

Apostates from his favor and rebels against his government, we were objects of his just and sore displeasure. Without the least impeachment of his righteousness, he might have sworn in his wrath that we should never enter into his rest. But in the multitude of his mercies he provides for us, even for *us*, a ransom that delivers from going down into the pit. *God so loved*—how mighty the emphasis !—*so loved the world that he GAVE*—not an angel, nor a host of angels—but *his ONLY BEGOTTEN SON*, *that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Draw nigh, and contemplate *the love of CHRIST* ; a love without parallel, and beyond comprehension. *Though he was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was*

made in the likeness of men. Source of eternal wonder ! Lo “ the Creator of the ends of the earth ” descends into a tabernacle of flesh, and sojourns among men ! And whence, blessed Lord, whence this condescension ? It was for “ the good of his chosen.” He assumed their nature that he might occupy their place ; might take their guilt ; might become *a curse for them that they might be made the righteousness of God in him.* Yes, dear Christian, he put his soul in *thy* soul’s stead ; he drank *for thee* the cup of trembling ; it was *thy* guilt which nailed him to the ignominious tree ; *thy* guilt which rolled the billows of wrath in upon his sinless soul. It was in bearing *thine iniquity* that hell’s blackest midnight thickened upon his spirit, and wrung from him that agonizing cry, MY GOD, MY GOD, *why hast THOU forsaken me ?* Hath he passed through the fires of the pit to *save thee ?* and doth he “ stake all the glories of his crown to *keep thee ?* ” and wilt thou, canst thou, darest thou be backward in promoting the frequent commemoration of his love ? O Saviour, if we forget thee, let our right hand forget her cunning !

Draw nigh once more, and contemplate *the harmony of the divine attributes in the recovery of sinners.*

In this astonishing death, *mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.* While the blood of expiation flows, and fire from above consumes the sacrifice, a cloud of incense, rising up from the altar, announces at the throne of God an offering of a sweet-smelling savor. Now *God can be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.* Into this plan of grace and truth the angels desire to look. They see, with admiration, the prince of this world cast out; his prey torn from his hands; his kingdom of darkness rent to its foundation. They see God's threatening fulfilled; his government exalted; transgression punished; and yet his name glorified in the salvation of the transgressor. **JUSTICE**, appeased, puts up her sword, while **MERCY** lifts the wretch from the abyss of his pollutions and his crimes. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! Yea, it BECAME him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*

These are considerations which render the death of Christ infinitely interesting to a believer, on which he cannot meditate too often nor too intensely. The very life of his soul

lies in experiencing their power. The more his faith is exercised upon them, the more will he imbibe of their virtue; and be conformed to his crucified Head. In proportion, then, as it is his duty to be under the influence of those evangelical principles which a sanctified view of the death of Christ begets and cherishes, it is also his duty to be engaged in the frequent commemorations of his death. And hence I add, that

As the death of the Lord Jesus is thus inseparably connected with the great *doctrines* of godliness, so, in the

5th place, it hath a *mighty efficacy in quickening the graces and mortifying the corruptions of believers*. Those who are best acquainted with themselves, know that nothing but communion with Christ in his death can conquer their depravity. Their old man is *crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth they should not serve sin*. Let them declare *when* it is that sin, in every shape, is most detestable in their eyes; *when* their desires for perfect deliverance from it are most ardent; *when* the emotions of lust expire within them. Is it not when they obtain a commanding view of their Lord Jesus, *as bearing their sins in his own body on the tree*? Yes, one believing glimpse of Christ crucified does infinitely more

in “subduing their iniquities,” than all their resolutions, their watchfulness, their struggles, without it. Let them declare, also, *when* the adversary gets the advantage over them; *when* the “law in their members, warring against the law of their mind, brings them” most easily “into captivity to the law of sin and death;” is it not when their views of his cross are beclouded, and “faith in his blood” enfeebled?

On the other hand, *when* is every holy grace most lively and flourishing? If “the peace of God rule in their hearts,” and his love be “shed abroad therein by the Holy Ghost”—if they be “clothed with humility”—if “patience have her perfect work”—if hope tower, and faith triumph, and love to the brethren glow—if, trampling on this miserable world, they “set their affections on things above,” and “press towards the mark for the prize of their high calling of God in Christ Jesus;” it is because they are “crucified with Christ;” it is in *bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus is made manifest in their mortal flesh*. If such, then, is the connection between the cross of Christ and the life of faith; if such its influence on a believer’s peace, and holiness, and comfort, and preparation for “an abundant entrance in-

to the kingdom" of his Father; how important the duty of retaining the spiritual impressions of it; how strong the necessity of frequent and *very* frequent recurrence to that ordinance which is destined to recall it afresh to our memories, and which, by sensible tokens, so evidently sets forth Christ crucified!

6. In the holy supper believers are often admitted to *near intercourse with the God of the spirits of all flesh.*

Communion is one of the most prominent features of the ordinance. *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* It is here seen that the fellowship of believers *is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.* And here the Lord not only attests its *reality*, but is often pleased to give them a sweet and powerful *sense* of it. Covered with celestial food, food such as angels never tasted, how often has the sacramental table been to the children of promise a scene of delight ineffable! The kind invitation, *Eat, O friends! drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!* hath thrilled their very souls. They can well remember how bountifully their God hath dealt with them, while they were endeavoring to honor him by show-

ing forth the death of his Son. They came hungry, and he hath set them down to a *feast of fat things*, and hath *satisfied them with the goodness of his house, even of his holy place*. They came disconsolate, and he hath *given them beauty for ashes; the oil of joy for mourning; the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*. They came with feeble and with fainting steps, and he hath *strengthened them with might by his Spirit in the inner man*. They came bowed down under the weight of the body of death, and groaning beneath the oppressions of unbelief, and he hath “removed the burden from their shoulders.” The spirit of bondage hath fled before the spirit of adoption: *Abba, Father!* was their gracious aspiration. In the liberty of the gospel they have cried out, *O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant; thou hast loosed my bonds!* In a word, he hath disappointed all their apprehensions; he hath dried up their tears; hath stilled the inward tumult; hath dissipated their darkness; hath poured his consolations into their hearts; hath enabled them to “enter with boldness into the holiest by the blood of Jesus;” caused them to “see his power and his glory; sealed them up by the Holy Ghost unto the day of redemption,” and sent them away encompassed with these “songs of salvation:” *Because thy loving-*

kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee : thus will I bless thee while I live : I will lift up my hands in thy name. Bless the Lord; O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name ! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits ! who forgiveth all thine iniquities ; who healeth all thy diseases ; who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies ; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

This, indeed, hath not been the happiness of *every* believer ; nor is it always the happiness of *any* believer. But it certainly hath been, and yet is often enjoyed at the table of the Lord : perhaps more often, proportionably, than in any other exercise. And this, not because it is in itself more holy than the rest, or because access to God therein is in itself more near ; but he will put a special honor upon it and upon them who love it, because it is that ordinance, which, in a special manner, puts honor upon his Son Jesus.

And now, Christian, interrogate thine own heart. Say, as in the sight of thy beloved, is it not thy duty and thy privilege *often* to keep the feast in remembrance of him ? Wilt thou refuse to display before the world a bold and generous testimony for his name ? Is it to

thee unprofitable or unpleasant to recognize, at short intervals, thy union and communion with him and in him with all the household of faith? Art thou in danger of entertaining, from the frequent commemoration of his death, too deep an abhorrence for sin? Of realizing, too sensibly, its eternal opposition to Jehovah's purity? Of esteeming too highly his pardoning grace? Of being unduly affected with the love of Jesus? Of admiring to excess that holy plan by which God is infinitely magnified; and thou hast escaped the wrath to come? Canst thou not find frequent employment for a *sanctifying* Saviour? Hast thou no lust to subdue? no grace to quicken? no mercy to ask? Hast thou won the crown? all thine adversaries slain, and all thy conflicts over? Art thou indifferent about meeting with thy God? Are his consolations small with thee? or the light of his countenance a thing of naught? But why rend thy bosom with questions like these? No believer can think thus. And can he apologize to his own conscience? can he apologize to his Lord, for infrequent, very infrequent, attendance upon that ordinance in which his self and all the benefits of his covenant are represented, sealed, and applied? Did he intend, suppose ye, that this memorial of his death should be thrust into a corner of

the year? Or could they who heard the tender and piercing words, *This do in remembrance of me*, have believed that any who love his name would treat it with such indignity? No never, never! Were Paul to rise from his rest and to visit our churches, one of the first things he would miss is the communion-table. What would be our confusion, should he address us in inquiries like these: "How often do you remember your Redeemer in the sacramental feast? every Sabbath? every other Sabbath? every third Sabbath? every month?" Alas! no. This was never heard or thought of among us. "How often, then?" Oh! I feel the rising blush—but the shameful truth must come out: "Generally, not more than twice in the year." What astonishment would seize the apostle! He would hardly own us for disciples. Is this, Christian brethren, our kindness to our Friend? This our reverence for his injunction, our return for his love? We are verily guilty concerning our Brother. It becomes us to rouse from our lethargy; to throw ourselves abashed at his feet; to implore his forgiveness; to evince our sincerity by correcting our fault; and no longer disobey him and forsake our own mercies.

LETTER III.

Objections Answered—Innovation

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

THE duty of frequent communion is so undeniable, and the argument by which it is enforced appeals with such power to every gracious principle, that there seems no room for objection. But objections are made ; and by those, too, who, we must hope, desire to walk in all the commandments of the Lord blameless. Experience teaches us, that prejudice, even in upright minds, is sufficient to obscure the most luminous truths, and to magnify the most trifling difficulty into an impassable mountain. I shall, therefore, attempt to obviate those objections which appear, from their popularity, to be thought most important.

I. It is said that the measure proposed *would innovate upon the established order of the church.*

To this I reply, that if it be, *indeed*, an innovation, and if, as it hath been proved, it is nevertheless our *duty*, then it is high time the

innovation was made, and the habits of *old* transgression removed. Let not the terror of an ill-sounding epithet defeat a needful and scriptural alteration. The cry of innovation is no proof that a measure is not both lawful and wise. It was raised by the prelatists against our venerable ancestors; by the apostates of Rome against the illustrious reformers; by the Scribes and Pharisees against Christ himself. But happily the fact is otherwise. Frequent communion is *not* an innovation. The odium of this charge lies upon our present practice. Many consider as a part of the good way, whatever is older than themselves. But when we speak of innovation in the church of Christ, we are not to inquire merely what was done by our fathers, or grandfathers, or their sires: but what was the order of the church *from the beginning*? How did Christ ordain? How did his Apostles conduct? In what state did *they* leave the church? Now it is notorious, that during the first three centuries of the Christian era, communions were held with a frequency of which, among us, we have neither example nor resemblance. It is also notorious, that the original frequency of communions declined as carnality and corruption gained ground: and it is no less notorious, that it has been urged as a weighty duty, by

the best of men, and the best of churches, in the best of times.

A brief illustration of these points, may not be unacceptable to the reader—

As to the *first*; it is demonstrable, that among the primitive Christians, the celebration of the supper was a part of the *ordinary sanctification of the Lord's day*.

To begin with the Apostles. We learn from Acts xx. 7, that *on the first day of the week—the disciples came together to break bread*. Hence it is evident, not only that Christians assembled on the Lord's day for public worship, but that they did not part without commemorating his death. What else can be meant by *breaking of bread*? It is a phrase, borrowed from Christ himself, to signify the communion of the supper. And most assuredly his people did not assemble on his day for any common or carnal purposes. Nay, it is intimated that sacramental communion was a *principal*, if not *the principal* object of their meeting. Prayer, praise, and preaching of the word, were, doubtless, their stated exercises; but of such moment was the supper considered, that in recording their employment on the Sabbath, the sacred historian mentions nothing else; they came together *to break bread*. The argument must be decisive with all who al-

lege this place to prove that the Apostolic churches sanctified the first, instead of the seventh day of the week. For the historian does not more positively say that they *came together*, than that they came together *to break bread*. Indeed, the strength of the argument, drawn from this passage, to prove the change of the Sabbath, lies in the supposition that this “breaking of bread” signifies the sacrament of the supper; because it is the only expression from which we gather that the meeting of the disciples was both a *stated* one, and for *religious* ends. It is plain that they were not called together to hear the Apostle preach; but that he preached to them on the first day of the week, because they then came together, of course, *to break bread*: for he arrived at Troas the Monday preceding; and instead of assembling them, as he might easily have done, he appears to have *waited six days*, that he might meet them on the *seventh*, which was the Lord’s day. And designing to depart on the morrow, or Monday, he was so pressed for time that he protracted his sermon till midnight. All which difficulty he would have avoided by summoning the church in the foregoing week; but he chose rather to undergo it, than not to give his Apostolical sanction to the sanctification of the Lord’s day, or lose

the pleasure of joining with the brethren in commemorating his death. You must, therefore, admit either that this celebrated passage* contains no proof that the primitive Christians *habitually* sanctified the Lord's day; or that *weekly communions* were their constant practice.

To the same purpose is the testimony of Paul. 1 Cor. xi. 20. He had reproved the Corinthians for their scandalous dissensions in the place, and at the time of public worship. *You come together*, says he, *not for the better, but for the worse. For when ye come together IN THE CHURCH, I hear that there be divisions* (schisms) *among you.* Ver. 17. 18. That these "schisms" occurred in their indecent manner of communicating is undeniable. For, with reference to them the apostle proceeds, v. 20. *When ye come together, therefore, into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.* "By your shameful behavior, the ordinance is so prostituted that it resembles nothing less than the supper of the Lord." The apostle tells us, that their irregularities happened, *when they came together in the church*, and that the scene of them was the *table of the Lord*. Whence it follows, that the celebration of the supper was a regular con-

* Its true meaning, and the strong argument which it affords for the change of the Sabbath, are ably stated in that learned work, entitled, *Sabbatum redivivum*, part ii. p. 517—520. -

comitant of their stated meetings for public worship; and these, we know, were held at least *every Lord's day*. The conclusion results necessarily from the tenor of the apostle's argument, "which evidently supposes, that whenever they assembled together, they came to eat the Lord's supper; for otherwise their coming together so as not to eat the Lord's supper, would be no proof that their coming together was for the worse."*

Weekly communions did not die with the apostles and their contemporaries. There is a cloud of witnesses to testify that they were kept up, by succeeding Christians, with great care and tenderness, for above two centuries. It is not necessary to swell these pages with quotations. The fact is indisputable.† It was even common to communicate *three and four times* a week, and in some place *every day*. Communion every Lord's day, however, was universal; and was preserved in the Greek church till the *seventh* century; "and

* Erskine's *Theological Dissertations*, p. 262.

† Plin. *Epist*, lib. 10. ep. 97. p. 724. ed. Veenhusii. Just. Martyr. *Apol.* 2da. opp. p. 98. D. *Paris*. 1636. Tertull. *de orat.* p. 135, 136. ed. Rigaltii.—Whoever wishes to see these, and numerous other testimonies to the same effect, cited at large, may consult Erskine's *Dissertation on frequent communicating*; and especially Bingham's *Origines Ecclesiasticæ*, Book xv. Chap. ii. where a multitude of authorities are collected and elucidated.

such as neglected *three weeks* together were excommunicated.”*

In this manner did the spirit of ancient piety cherish the memory of a Saviour's love. There was no need of reproof, remonstrance, or entreaty. No trifling excuses for neglect were ever heard from the lips of a Christian ; for *such* a neglect had not yet degraded the Christian's name. He carried in his own bosom sufficient inducements to obey, without reluctance, the precept of his Lord. It was his choice, his consolation, his joy. These were days of life and glory ; but days of dishonor and death were shortly to succeed ; nor was there a more ominous symptom of their approach, than the decline of frequent communicating. For as the power of religion appears in a solicitude to magnify the Lord Jesus continually ; so the decay of it is first detected by the encroachments of indifference. It was in the *fourth* century, that the church began very discernibly to forsake her first love. The ardor of primitive zeal gave way to a cold formality, and the supper of the Lord, sooner perhaps than any other institution, fell a prey to its malignant influence. “About the year 324, it was decreed at a council held at Illiberis, in Spain, that no

* Erskine's *Dissertations*, p. 271.

offerings should be received from such as did not receive the Lord's supper :* which shows that some, who called themselves Christians, were beginning to neglect the dying command of their professed Lord."

"About the year 341, a council at Antioch decreed, that all who came to church, and heard the scriptures read, but afterwards joined not in prayer and receiving the sacrament, should be cast out of the church, till such time as they gave public proof of their repentance."†

"Towards *the close of the fourth century*, men grew more and more cold and indifferent about the Lord's supper ; so that the elegant Chrysostom complains, 'In vain we stand at the altar ; none care to receive.' "‡

"At length, communicating weekly, or even monthly begins to appear burdensome. The greater part received the sacrament only three times a year ; and some not so often. This occasioned the council of Agde, or Agatha, in Languedoc, met in the year 506, to decree, that none should be esteemed good Christians who did not communicate, at least, at the *three* great festivals, Christmas, Easter,

* Concil. Illiberit. can. 28.

† Concil. Antioch. can. 2.

‡ Chrysost. Hom. III. in Ephes.

and Whitsunday :* and accordingly, from that time forward, those of the church of Rome esteemed themselves, in so far, good enough Christians, if they communicated thrice a year ; and that it was presumption to receive oftener.”† And, mark it well, reader ; their sense of the necessity of frequent communions decreased, in proportion as they became addicted to *will-worship* ; and the superstition of *uncommanded holidays*.

From such an outset, matters proceeded, very naturally, from bad to worse, till the unblushing degeneracy had nearly discarded sacramental communion altogether. The council of Lateran under Pope Innocent III. in 1215 ; that very council which established the accursed tenet of auricular confession ; and the more accursed tenet of transubstantiation, decided a *yearly* communion at *Easter*, to be sufficient.‡ The decision was not more un-

* Concil. Agath. can. 18.

† Erskine's *Dissertations*, p. 267, 268, 271.

‡ Bingham's *Origines Eccles.* Book xv. ch. ix. 6. Mosheim, vol. iii. p. 250. Fleury, *Historie Ecclesiastique*, tom. xi. p. 279, 280. 4to. This eminent popish historian, compelled to own that yearly communications were the effect of “the remissness and lukewarmness of Christians,” seems himself a little scandalized at the decree of Innocent's council. The only apology which his ingenuity could suggest, is as severe a censure as a Protestant would desire. They did nothing more “than conform to the practice already tolerated by the church.” “Dans l'usage introduit par le relâchement

scriptural, than it was crafty and impious. For by removing this sacrament from ordinary view, and connecting it with the pomp of *Easter*, it augmented the artificial devotion of an ignorant and deluded age, and signally promoted the idolatry of the *host*.

Here, then, we have traced infrequent communion to its source—the *example, traditions, and enactments* of apostate Rome. So firmly was this conviction rivetted in Calvin's breast, that he scrupled not to term annual communions, *a contrivance of the devil*.* The authority of Rome is surely not so venerable, nor her bequests so precious, that we need be over-nice in departing from her precedents. Certain it is, that the best of men and the purest of churches, have been so far from considering frequent communion as a rash and hurtful innovation, that they have both desired and

et la teneur des Chrestiens, la plupart ne communioient plus qu'une fois l'an, a Pâques—Ainsi le concile de Latran ne fit—que se conformer a l'usage deja toleré par l'eglise.” *Ib.* p. 281, i. e. The council only sanctioned “remissness and lukewarmness,” out of respect to an *old custom*. Ah Popery!

* The very words of Calvin are, “And truly, this custom, which enjoins communicating once every year, is *a most evident contrivance of the devil*; by whose instrumentality soever it may have been determined.” “*Et sane hæc consuetudo quæ semel quotannis communicare jubet, certissimum est diaboli inventum; cujus-cunque tandem ministerio iavecta fuerit.*” Calvin *instit.* lib. iv., cap. 17, 46.

urged it as a most blessed reformation. A few testimonies to this purpose, may be gratifying to the reader.

The excellent Calvin complains, that in his day, professors, conceiting they had fully discharged their duty by a single communion, resigned themselves for the rest of the year to supineness and sloth. "It ought to have been," says he, "far otherwise. *Every week*, at least, the table of the Lord should have been spread for Christian assemblies; and the promises declared, by which, in partaking of it, we might be spiritually fed."

Entirely with Calvin agrees his cotemporary, that able defender of the reformation, Martin Chemnitz. He closes a series of judicious remarks with the following strong expression: "they are neither true nor faithful ministers of Christ, who, *by any means whatever*, either lead away or deter the people from the *frequent* use of sacramental communion." And what he understood by *frequency* is clear from the very next words, in which he feelingly extols the "most *lovely examples* of genuine antiquity."

The admirable Witsius, after a short detail of the original frequency of communicating, and of its decline with the "increase of numbers and the decrease of zeal," exclaims,

“ Alas ! how far are we at this day from the sanctity and zeal of the ancients ?” It is true, he was not without apprehension, that, in a general corruption of manners, a too great frequency might depreciate the ordinance. There was little reason, as we shall shortly see, for the good man’s fear, and less for his precaution. Modern Christianity is in no danger of running into an extreme by emulating, on this subject, the ardor of an apostle.

Calderwood, in his elaborate controversy with the prelatists, lays the blame of infrequent communion on the want of zeal and love which throws us so far behind the primitive church, but insists that this should be no obstacle to its restoration.

Had I intended, or did the limits of this discussion permit, it would be easy to adduce on the same side of the question a long list of illustrious names, not more graceful to my page than savory to the church of Christ. The general sentiment of those who have thought most profoundly as well as piously on the subject, accords perfectly with the preceding. Nor is it the sentiment of individuals merely ; it hath been expressed in the most solemn manner by the purest churches of the reformation.

The constitution of the Belgic or Dutch

church of 1581 appointed the supper to be celebrated *every other month*.*

The discipline of the Reformed churches of France, after noticing that it had not been usual with them to celebrate the holy supper oftener than *four times* a year, recommends a *greater frequency*; (the due respect being preserved,) that believers, treading in the footsteps of the primitive church, may be exercised, *and may increase in faith* by the frequent use of the sacraments.†

The church of Scotland, at her first reformation, insisted upon *four* communions in the year;‡ and there is every probability that she would have gone farther, but from an opinion that the people, just emerging from the dark-

* Voetii disputat. tom. iv. p. 761.

† Bien qu'on n'ait pas accoutumé de celebrer dans nos Eglises la sainte Cene, plus souvent que *quatre fois l'an*; toutefois il seroit *bien a desirer*, qu'elle se celebrat *plus souvent*, le respect qui y est requis etant gardé; parceque il est tres utile que le peuple fidele soit exercé, et qu'il *croisse en la foi*, par l'usage *frequent des sacramens*, comme aussi l'exemple de l'eglise primitive nous y convie. *Discipline des Eglises Reformées*, chap. xii. 14. On this canon, Mr. L'Arroque observes, that at the synod of Orleans, in 1562, a minister of *Picardy*, who used to celebrate the supper *every month*, was advised to follow the custom of the other churches, merely for the sake of uniformity. It seems, however, that they had thought better of the matter, as the canon in its present form was drawn up by the synod of Paris in 1565. L'Arroque, *Defence de la Discipline des Eglises Reformées de France*, p. 290. 4to.

‡ 1st *Book of Discipline*, Art. XIII.

ness and bondage of popery, were unable to bear it. This conjecture is founded upon what actually took place at the modeling of that plan of doctrine, worship, &c., by the Westminster Assembly, which united in one most evangelical communion the churches of England, Scotland, and Ireland. The directory for public worship prescribes the frequent celebration of the Lord's supper: nay, it supposes that it should be so frequent as to supersede the necessity even of a *previous intimation*.

"Where this sacrament cannot with convenience be *frequently* administered, it is requisite that public warning be given the sabbath day before the administration thereof."

How often should it be administered to render this warning needless? Let this question be pondered by those who think 'semi-annual communions sufficient; yet that very directory have we adopted and affect to admire. Alas! what a flagrant contradiction between our profession and practice!

As an instructive comment on this part of the directory, it may be added, that several of the ministers who assisted in its compilation, and a great part of those who were ejected in the time of Charles II. for non-conformity, are *certainly known* to have celebrated the holy supper every month in their own

congregations.* Before this, in the days of Laud's corruption and tyranny, those eminent men of God, Mr. Robert Blair and Mr. Cunningham of Holywood, made such mutual arrangements as afforded their people opportunities of communicating *eight* times in the year.†

The foregoing facts will convince every honest inquirer, that frequent communion is not an *innovation*. It will be hard, indeed, if the combined suffrages of Apostles and reformers, of the best of men and the purest of churches, cannot wipe off the imputation. But it attaches, with an indelible stain, to our existing custom, which can boast of no such authority. This, which we are so afraid of altering, is a real innovation on Christian order, and an unhappy desertion of Christian principle. If innovation is, *in truth*, our abhorrence, let us endeavor to get out of its labyrinth ; and, retracing our wandering steps, let us return to the *old way* in which the first confessors of the cross have walked before us, and where we may expect to find much rest unto our souls.

* Erskine's Dissertations, p. 274.

† Erskine, p. 279.

LETTER IV.

The Subject Continued—Irreverence—Want of Preparation.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

ATTEMPTS to restore frequent communion have been charged, not only with innovation, but with *disrespect* to the ordinance of the supper: for it is objected,

II. That “by rendering the duty *too common*, it would deaden affection, destroy solemnity, banish reverence, and thus be injurious to the religion which it is designed to aid.”

That such an objection should be made by a formalist, who goes to the communion-table once or twice a year to save appearances, or to quiet conscience, is nothing strange. But that it should ever be proposed by a living Christian is truly astonishing.

On what is it, on what *can* it be founded? Is it countenanced by the word of God, by the nature of the exercise, or by the experience of believers? Did Jesus when he said, *This do in remembrance of me*, caution us not to do it too frequently, lest we should lose our vener-

ation ? Did he bid us to show our reverence to his institution by trampling on his command ? or our gratitude for his love by slighting his memorial ? The same objection was made by some at the reformation, and was treated with the utmost indignation. *A wonderful reverence, truly, for the sacrament, cries Bucer, by which it is contemned, and the saving communion therein offered with the Son of God rejected !** But let us appeal to fact. Do other duties grow contemptible by their frequency ? Is the *Sabbath* vile because of its weekly return ? Are the divine scriptures, is family religion, are secret and ejaculatory prayer, insipid to those who are most conversant with them ? *Pray without ceasing*, saith the Holy Ghost. ‘*Pray but seldom,*’ replies the objection we are combating ; “ You will be too bold and familiar with holy things if you often meddle with them. Frequent prayer will end in profaning the presence of God, because it will diminish your sense of his majesty.” How does this language sound in pious ears ? The heart of a believer revolts : his blood runs cold. The testimony in his own breast refutes, as he goes along, these impious suggestions. And

*Mira sanè sacramenti reverentia, qua *contemnitur*, et salvisica in eo oblata filii Dei communicatio repudiatur ! apud CALDERWOOD in *Altar. Damasc.* p. 536.

can any man conceive why frequent prayer, meditation, &c., should promote the spiritual life, and frequent communicating hinder it? Will increased faith produce unbelief, or renewed love indifference? Will melting views of divine grace harden the heart, or a commanding sense of the divine glory generate pride? Will “fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” abate heavenly-mindedness, or the sealing of the Spirit of promise nurture carnal confidence? Oh!—tell it not in Gath! Let not the rumor reach an uncircumcised ear, that believers in Jesus, who profess to love him supremely, proclaim his excellence to others, and declare that the more they know and enjoy of him, the more they desire to know and to enjoy—that even believers in Jesus, when invited to frequent an ordinance which he hath left as a seal of their covenant-mercies, a mean of intercourse with himself, a pledge of his eternal kingdom, should not only *refuse*, but *justify* their refusal, by pleading that it would—*diminish their reverence!!*

No, Christian reader; carelessness and carnality keep pace with neglect. The new man is deprived of his food, while the old man, “corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,” gains strength, and thus aversion from

duty is doubled with remissness. This is a lesson of universal experience. Never were there more devout and humble, and reverential communions, than in the days of primitive purity. No where, at this hour, do they more deeply interest pious affection, or exert a benigner influence, than where they most resemble, both in frequency and simplicity, the apostolic pattern.

III. It is objected, that “very frequent communicating is unfriendly to suitable preparation, as we could not always afford the time necessary to be spent in it.”

Far, infinitely far, be it from me to encourage levity or sloth in a service so spiritual. Woe to him whose profane approach makes him “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” But in many, there is reason to fear, the objection arises from no such scruple. It cannot but be a favorite with those, who “having the form of godliness without the power,” find it useful in palliating their inattention to a duty which they secretly hate, and from which they would gladly be exempted. Miserable men! They need preparation indeed, but such as they will never acquire by the farce of “hanging down their heads like a bulrush, and assuming once in six months, or once in twelve, the austerity of

a monk, and the precision of a Pharisee; while, during the rest of the year, they sacrifice at the shrine of mammon or of lust.

In what, however, does preparation for the table of the Lord consist? In a multitude of outward performances? In devoting a great part of the preceding week to various exercises of public worship? Alas! all this may be done, and the heart remain as unprepared as ever. The religionist, who, besides giving tithes of all that he possessed, *fasted twice in the week*, was not thereby fitted for communion with his Maker. One hour, one minute, of genuine humiliation before God—one tear of gracious contrition for sin—one groan unutterable of the spirit of adoption, is of more value in his sight than the most splendid round of formalities. If we trample on manifest duty under the notion that by performing it *seldom* we shall perform it *better*, he will not accept a host of uncommanded offerings as an equivalent for the disobedience. He hath said, *I hate robbery for burnt offering*. “Burnt offering you must bring, but you shall not plunder your neighbor’s fold to replenish my altar.” Preparation for the holy supper is indispensable. But we may not withhold from our Redeemer the sacramental tribute on pretence, that, when we *do* pay it, we will make up the deficiency

by our superior qualification. It is the most perverse of all perversions to *displace* a duty by *preparing* for it.

But why must so much time be consumed in extraordinary preparation for the Lord's supper as to hinder its frequent celebration? It is said, that "we therein make a *nearer* approach to God than in other duties, and therefore need more cautious and thorough preparation."

This mode of arguing is common; but is it just? Is it scriptural? Let us examine it. Briefly, it amounts to this, that the Lord requires more holiness from us in sacramental than in other services; i. e. allows us to be *less holy* in the latter than in the former. I might excuse myself from saying another word about it: a simple statement is a refutation. But to sift it a little more—is God more holy on sacramental than on other occasions? Is an irreverent mind or a polluted heart less offensive to him on these than on those? Does communicating possess either more inherent or more accidental sanctity than any other act of spiritual worship? Let the living God plead his own cause. He hath said, *I will be sanctified in them that COME NIGH me*. Again: *Having boldness*, saith his apostle, *to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus—let us DRAW NIGH*.

It will not be disputed that these embrace *every act* of worship. God has, therefore, imprinted the *same* character upon them *all*; and as *he* has not discriminated between them on account of their greater or less degree of sacredness, let us beware how *we* do it. He is as jealous of his honor in prayer, in praise, &c., as in communicating. Were we rightly affected, as deep solemnity would rest on our spirits in asking a blessing at our meals, as in breaking the sacramental bread. And it betrays either much ignorance, or much carnality, if a communion-season fills us with awe, while the other offices of piety find us and leave us cold or unconcerned.

I am so far from questioning a believer's sweet and joyous communion with his God in the sacramental feast, that this is one of my principal arguments for its frequent celebration. But that it is, *in itself*, a *nearer* approach to him than others, or that *equal* nearness is not attainable in others, can never be admitted. Such an opinion is neither founded in the scripture nor supported by fact. What is communion with God in the usual acception of that phrase? Is it not the reciprocation of love between him and his people? *His* love "shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost;" and *their* love flowing out to him in

return? What is *nearness* to God? Is it not a realizing view by faith of his most glorious perfections, accompanied with a sense of his favor as *our* reconciled God in Christ? And will any pretend that believers may not at times enjoy these privileges as largely in the retirements of the closet, or in the other parts of public worship, as in communicating? Nay, is it not evident, that if you except the social acts of eating and drinking the symbolical bread and wine, the exercises of a communion-table are or ought to be the very same with those which should mark other duties of devotion? Godly sorrow for sin—triumph in the merits and grace of the Lord Jesus—self-dedication to him—appropriation of his covenant-mercies, &c., form the essence of worthy communicating; and they equally form the essence of every other part of acceptable worship. The tenet here opposed is therefore utterly groundless; and it is pernicious also, for it exalts one divine institution at the expense of the rest. And in its operation it may engender idolatrous notions of the supper, but will never promote a sound and evangelical piety.

An habitual frame for any duty to which we may be called, would be our unspeakable happiness. But on our present plan, one com-

munion is forgotten, and its impressions worn out, before the next arrives. A due frequency would bring on a new one, while the favor of the last is yet fresh and cheering. It would foster the spirit of communion-sabbaths, and keep our Lord's death in a manner always before our eyes. And whether this would not be a more effectual preparative for the sacramental supper, than a crowd of week-day services, let Christians judge.

The last two objections lead to consequences as forbidding as they are natural. If frequency of communion breeds irreverence, then reverence is befriended by unfrequent communion. If the former deprives us of leisure for preparation, then the latter must be highly favorable to it. The conclusion, on the whole, is, *the seldomer we communicate, the better*: and we would be far more reverentially impressed, and might be far better prepared, if, instead of twice in one year, the Lord's death were celebrated only once in two years, or once in ten. We should then have abundance of time for every prerequisite. We might have tenfold the present employment, and tenfold the pomp: if a week were too little, we could afford a month; and the supper of the Lord would be immensely honored. Hither the plea which I have been considering, conducts

us at last. But, O thou that lovest a crucified Saviour, avoid its snare. This smiling vizard conceals a fiend. Beneath this garb of piety lurks a dagger for thy life ; and ere thou art aware, it will stab thee to the heart, and put thy Redeemer to an open shame.

LETTER V.

Of the customary appendages to the Lord's supper; particularly public fasts and thanksgivings.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

A FEAR is entertained, that a frequency of communion, much greater than ordinary, would involve the abolition of the previous fast-day, and the subsequent day of thanksgiving;—and this forms, with many conscientious people, a

IV. and very formidable objection.

The consequence is not dissembled. These observances cannot consist with a proper regard to the command of the Lord Jesus. And if we mean to obey it “in simplicity and godly sincerity,” they *must* be laid aside.

The writer of these letters is very sensible that he here enters on the most delicate and difficult part of his undertaking; that, on this subject, the prejudices even of the truly pious are both strong and irritable; and that, if a

well-meant attempt to promote a *scriptural* commemoration of the love of Jesus Christ should fail, this is the rock on which it will perish. But being fully assured that the general attachment to these observances results less from conviction than from habit; and that a fair representation, candidly weighed, will remove every scruple, he deems it his duty to discuss them with openness and freedom. Let no upright man be alarmed for the issue. Truth cannot lose by inquiry. Error only shrinks back from the light, lest her “deeds should be reproved.”

Bear with me then, Christian brethren, while, in reviewing our sacramental fast and thanksgiving days, I endeavor to show,

First, That they have no warrant in the book of God.

Secondly, That they are contrary to the judgment of almost the whole Christian church.

Thirdly, That they are attended with great and serious evils.

To prevent mistake, the reader is admonished that a day of fasting before, and of thanksgiving after, the communion, are not condemned as *in themselves unlawful*, or in every connection improper. The object of animadversion is that *system* which either in-

culcates their *necessity*, or perpetuates their observance. With this explanation, then I say,

FIRST, *That they have no warrant in the book of God.*

That the scripture is a *perfect* revelation, containing everything necessary for the instruction and edification of the church; that nothing which it does not expressly appoint, or fairly imply, can be admitted into her doctrine, discipline, or worship; and that all opinions and practices, fathers, canons, and councils, are to be tried at its bar; are fundamental principles of Protestantism. Whatever cannot abide the furnace of “the law and the testimony,” though recommended by numbers, tradition, antiquity, or aught else, must be rejected as “reprobate silver.” This maxim was the two-edged sword which hewed down the legions of Antichrist before the victorious reformers. It is stated, with equal strength and precision, in our confession of faith,* and is received as an axiom in religious controversy, by all whom the subject in hand more immediately interests.

In applying this maxim to the case of the fast and thanksgiving days attached to the Lord’s supper, it will readily occur, that this

* Chapter i. 10.

part of Christian worship, if any, requires, in all its circumstances, to be distinctly marked. Is it, therefore, creditable, that God should couple it with a day of fasting and thanksgiving, and not even mention this in his word? And yet the scripture is silent. When Jesus Christ instituted the supper, he simply said, *Take, eat; this is my body—This cup is the New Testament in my blood: drink ye all of it.* When Paul interposed, with his apostolical authority, to correct the abuses which had crept into the church at Corinth, he detailed the nature, ends, and manner of communicating. He even speaks, most pointedly, of preparation for it. *Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.* But not a syllable of fast-days. Now, can any judicious Christian imagine, that neither Christ himself, in the institution of the supper, nor his apostle, in restoring its decayed purity, should hint at observances which both knew to be connected with it? Could such an omission have been suffered, when the Lord foresaw that, for a series of ages, his church would, in this very particular, go universally and uniformly astray?

It is not, indeed, as far as I know, maintained by any, that he has *explicitly* enjoined these days; but many plead that they are, neverthe-

less, *deducible* from scriptural declarations and appointments.

They find that on the great day of expiation, a *solemn fast* was kept in Israel: and hence infer, that as a public fast preceded the offering up of the typical sacrifice for sin, so it ought to precede the commemoration of the *real* sacrifice, which is already offered. “Is not sin as evil and as bitter now as it was then, and humiliation for it as pressing a duty? Should not the memorial of Emmanuel’s suffering, excite as much compunction as the prospect of it?” No doubt. Believers will never disagree in this. It is perfectly just: and yet the argument drawn from it utterly inconclusive. In tracing the *analogy* of the two cases, it overlooks an essential difference, viz. the divine precept in the one, which is wanting in the other: and in laboring to bring the Jewish *example* to bear, it presents no point of attack where it is not mortally vulnerable.

1. The Jewish fast was peculiar to the old dispensation, and so cannot establish a precedent for the new.

2. It ceased with the law of Moses; and it is certainly singular reasoning, that an ordinance which God himself hath *abolished*, infers his will, that a similar one should be *perpetuated*.

3. Our fast-days are *preparative* to the supper: but the Jewish fast bore no such relation to the sacrifice on the day of atonement. It was not a preparative, but an accompanying exercise.

4. The supper has not succeeded to the sacrifice of the day of expiation; but to the feast of the passover: it is from this institution therefore, if from any in the Old Testament, that we are to derive the manner of celebrating it. But the passover was not preceded by a day of fasting, though it was followed by a holy convocation, and a week of unleavened bread. Here, then, is a much stronger reason from analogy, *against* our sacramental fast, than the day of expiation can furnish *for* it. And whoever finds the Monday thanksgiving in the "holy convocation" after the passover, must also find something to correspond with the "seven days of unleavened bread."

5. As the good faith of argument requires us to admit the legitimate consequences of our principles, let us see whither the plea that the fast on the day of expiation warrants a fast before the supper, will lead us.

On the same ground you must maintain that the supper should be celebrated but *once a year*; and this would be equally repugnant to its own nature, and the example of the Apos-

bles, who certainly understood the will of Christ as well as we can pretend to do.

But now, if one Jewish institution furnish a precedent for imitation, it is hard to tell why another may not; the *daily sacrifice* for instance; seeing it as really typified the atonement of Christ, as the sacrifices of annual expiation did. Thus we should be reduced to a curious dilemma; the argument from one ordinance, limiting us to a *yearly* communion, while the argument just as good, from another, would oblige us to communicate *twice a day*.

This sample of inconsistency and contradiction is enough to show how cautiously inferences are to be drawn from institutions under the law, to duties under the gospel. Error here has been one of the most fruitful sources of corruption; and an inlet to all the rabble of the Anti-christian hierarchy.

There have not been wanting some to allege the four fasts mentioned by Zechariah, which the Jews kept on account of their calamities, as countenancing our sacramental fasts. But the notion is so extravagant, that it would be worse than trifling to spend a moment in refuting it.

Should these refuges fail, there is one left; viz. that religious fasting, before special duties, has ever been deemed by the church of God

both suitable and necessary; and that it becomes us to act upon this principle when we are about to join in the communion of "the body and blood of the Lord." Here a large column of texts is displayed, some containing the doctrine, and some examples of fasting. But after they are collected with so much pains, and propounded with so much zeal, what do they prove? Nothing more than that fasting, on particular occasions, is a moral duty. This is mere "beating the air." Nobody denies it.

The question is not whether fasting is a divine ordinance, but whether it is a divine ordinance *preparative to the holy supper*? Now it is obvious, that the application of a principle to particular circumstances cannot be grounded upon texts which speak of it only in general, without any reference to those circumstances. Such is the nature of the passages alluded to. If in this question they prove any thing, they equally prove the necessity of fasting before baptism; before the Sabbath; before family worship, or craving a blessing to our meat, as before the sacrament of the supper; because they have no more coupled it with the latter than with the former. "These things," you will say, "are absurd." Absurd enough, I own. And one would think that the argu-

ment which begets them cannot be much better.

In order, therefore, to work up your quotations into proofs, you must resort to those scriptural examples in which the principle of fasting is reduced to practice. But the success here will be little better. It would be no difficult task to show that none of the instances which the scripture has recorded of social or solitary fasting, lend the least aid to the service into which they are pressed. Who can bear such reasoning as this? David fasted when the prophet Nathan charged upon him the guilt of adultery and murder—Ezra and his company at their return from captivity—Nehemiah with the Jews at the restitution of Jehovah's worship, and the solemn recognition of his covenant—the apostles at the ordination of ministers—therefore we must have a fast-day before the sacrament of the supper!! An apostle cautions against “wresting the scriptures;” and they are always wrested when they are brought to prove what they *will not* prove. High indignity is offered to them and to their Author when men are determined to force out of them, at all events, a testimony according to their wishes; and rather than fail, will adjudge them to the tortures of licentious criticism. Be it remem-

bered, they are sworn witnesses for the King Eternal ; let their deposition be heard ; but if it do not accord with our prejudices, let us beware how we presume to order them to the rack.

It will still, however, be insisted, that scriptural precept, together with the example of the saints, establish this position, *That on the approach of special duty, and in the expectation of special blessings, we are to humble ourselves before God in religious fasting ; and that the supper being an occasion on which we perform the one and look for the other, a preparatory fast is highly necessary.* The plea accosts us here in its most imposing form. But, notwithstanding, there are weighty reasons for refusing our assent.

1. The cases are not parallel. All the scriptural instances of public fasting are founded in circumstances *out of the ordinary course of providence* ; and therefore leave precedents for such circumstances *only*. But the sacrament of the supper is an *ordinary* part of divine worship ; or if it be in any respect otherwise, our own negligence and not God's word has made it so.

2. If the scriptural doctrine and examples of fasting oblige us to that exercise as preparative to the Lord's table, it is beyond measure

astonishing that this was never thought of till the other day ; that it should not be heard of among Christians for near seventeen hundred years ; nor then, except in a corner of the church ; nor even in that corner till men were driven to invent a defense of a custom which they had observed, without asking whether it was right or wrong. Nay, that a principle of practical religion which involves a serious question of duty and sin should be overlooked by the very apostles under the plenary inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and by Christ Jesus himself ! If the reader can credit all this, it is time to lay aside this discussion. It is vain to contend with prejudice impenetrable to every thing but Omnipotence.

3. The force of the plea we are examining lies in assuming, that the Lord's supper *is* one of those special occasions to which the above principle strictly applies. But this is taking for granted the very thing in dispute. That the Lord's supper is such an occasion is peremptorily denied ; and the proof of the affirmative lies upon the affirmers. However, not to take the advantage of so material an error, it may be remarked, that *special* occasions of duty being such as are out of the line of God's *ordinary providence*, the special duties adapted to them must be such as depart from the line

of his *ordinary worship*. As we cannot determine beforehand the period of their arrival, so we cannot beforehand determine the season of the duties attached to them. With regard to societies, they may not occur perhaps once in two or three years; and the larger the society, and the more complex the social relations, the longer in all probability will be their intervals; yet they *may* occur half a dozen times in one year. It is plain, then, that none of the ordinary institutions of the gospel can furnish any such special occasions, and so cannot obligate to any such special duties. Now the Lord's supper is one of the most important of these ordinary * institutions; it equally belongs to times of prosperity and of adversity, of joy and of sorrow.

Farther, as it is not in itself an extraordinary duty, so the blessings which we are to seek in performing it do not come under the description of special blessings; i. e. blessings *appropriated* to special occasions as already defined. If, in controverting this sentiment, any use the term "special" more vaguely, he will only destroy his own argument, since its very existence depends on the supper being in a restricted sense a special occasion of duty. I

* Confess. of Faith, ch. xxi. 5.

would therefore beg the Christian to point out a single blessing to be supplicated or expected at the holy communion, which he does not, or at least ought not, to supplicate and expect in *every* approach to God through the faith of Jesus. Till this be done, all that has been and all that can be said about the *speciality* of the blessings connected with the sacrament of the supper, is mere illusion. It is not, no, it is not, a just regard for that precious ordinance, which, both in opinion and practice, hath put the prodigious difference between it and others; but *these* are not duly improved; *these* are undervalued, and men seek to compensate their fault by idolizing the other.

On the whole it appears, that our sacramental fast and thanksgiving days are destitute of Christ's authority.* The utmost that can be alleged for them, amounting with the most liberal indulgence to no more than a *presumption* from analogy; a presumption opposed by a thousand contrary presumptions; a presumption which violates every law of analogical inference; which cuts instead of untying the

* Even the soberer *papists* confess that "it does not appear by his own practice, or any commands which he gave to his disciples, that he instituted *any* particular fasts, or enjoined any to be kept out of pure devotion." Calmet's *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. i., p. 556. Art. Fasting.

knot of difficulty ; attempts to browbeat facts, and flies in the face of apostolical precedent.

LETTER VI.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

MY second proposition relative to days of public fasting and thanksgiving at the celebration of the Lord's supper, is, that *they are contrary to the judgment of almost the whole Christian church.*

By the Christian church, I understand the body of visible believers, from the resurrection of Christ until now.

The only way of ascertaining their judgment on this point, is to inquire into their practice, compared with their known and established principles. It would be idle to demand any other kind of proof: for no man in his senses will look for express and formal condemnation of what was never heard nor thought of. The argument, therefore, is this; that *if days of public fasting and thanksgiving at the sacrament of the supper, as now in use among us, were unknown in the church for a long series of ages; then, for a long series of ages, it*

was not her judgment that they should be observed. And this, if duly considered, will demonstrate that they never were appointed by Christ, and have no claim on our regard. For although the existence of a custom in the church is no proof that it was instituted by Christ, yet the *non-existence* of it in the times of primitive purity, is proof decisive that he did *not* institute it. Man may have added to his worship, many uncommanded and superstitious rites ; but it cannot be pretended, that the church has *lost* any part of her testimony ; because she has not lost the Bible. A custom, then, affecting, in any manner, the vitals of duty, and of worship, and of which no traces are to be discovered in the apostolic church, nor in any part of the church at all, for a great number of centuries, is both unscriptural and anti-scriptural, and ought to be laid aside.

As to the apostolic church, viz., that which was founded by the ministry of the Apostles, and is described in their writings, every man, by reading his Bible, may decide for himself. Here all is plain and simple : not the most distant hint of our numerous observances.

When we descend to the succeeding ages, we see the inventions of men obtruded upon every department of the church's worship : her beauty disfigured by meretricious embel-

lishment ; and her appointments buried under a load of carnal rubbish. Fasts, feasts, and a monstrous assemblage of trinkets and trumpery, debauched men's minds from the "simplicity that is in Christ," turned his house into a puppet show, and marked the swift approach of the "man of sin." All these things were adopted, and justified, not on the authority of the written word : but on the pretext of decency, devotion, and especially of *tradition*. Then, indeed, there were fastings in abundance : forty days at once in Lent : four times more at stated seasons, and afterwards twice a week.

At these times, it is true, the custom was to communicate *fasting*. But still a fast-day, as preparative to it, was not known. When the communion happened on the Lord's day, (and amidst all the corruption it was yet common every Lord's day) it was celebrated early in the morning, and the fast was merely an abstinence from meat till it was over, when they fell to feasting. This is evident, not only because the feasts called *agapæ*, or love-feasts, usually accompanied the communion ; but because solemn decrees of council had pronounced fasting on the Lord's day, excepting Easter, a high offence. It was also frequent to communicate on fast-days through the week. But

fasting, in both these cases, arose from a very different cause, than a conviction of its necessity as a preparative for the communion. It originated in rank and pitiable superstition. On the Wednesday and Friday, both the one and the other were intended to honor the supposed sanctity of the days. And the reason of communicating fasting on the Lord's day was a notion that no meaner food ought to enter the communicant's mouth before the consecrated bread and wine. The great Augustine, speaking of this practice, says, "thus it hath pleased the Holy Ghost." But with all deference to this worthy father, we would rather have his proofs than his opinion; and must be excused, if, in appeals to unerring truth, we allow the Bible to speak for itself. It is true, indeed, that some of the ancients, as well as of the moderns, have quoted, in support of Augustine's assertion, 1 Cor. xi. 34. *The rest will I set in order when I come.* From which, say they, "we are given to understand, that the Apostle then appointed this custom of receiving fasting."* How they came at the inference is not quite so clear. To tell people *that if they were hungry they should eat at home,* is rather an odd way of enjoining a *fast*; and

hardly to be discovered without the penetration of the sage who spied a whole book of common prayer in the text, *Let all things be done to edifying*.

I am under no temptation to conceal what some may suppose inconsistent with the foregoing representation, that among the causes assigned for the observance of Lent, this was one, that persons who communicated but *once a year*, might, by great fastings and austerities, be purified from their sins, and qualified for the communion on *Easter Sunday*—Mark—once a year—on Easter Sunday. For that day was an high day, and was signalized, as well as the week preceding, with prodigious parade. I grievously mistake, if any to whom these pages are addressed, will chose to refer to this as a precedent; and if they should, it will only prove a serpent that will turn and bite them. For,

1. It was not preparation for the Lord's table, so much as preparation for it *at Easter*, that occasioned the previous fasting. The homage was paid to the *day*, not to the *ordinance*.

2. The reason, as far as it went, embraced two fast-days, viz. Friday and Saturday, and even extended to all the silly penances of Lent.

3. It was alleged only by a *few* who communicated but once a year, which, with the

multitude of their rites, they thought a full equivalent for the want of frequent communions. But this was the subject of severe and pointed crimination, by those who retained something of the Spirit of Peter and of Paul. And is it not strange that the very principle which, 1400 years ago, was lamented, by the best men in the church, as a sinful defection, should *now* be considered as a substantial part of a *reformation-testimony*?

4. The men least remarkable for their piety, were the most distinguished for these temporary rigors. None so filled with reverence for the sacrament as they: none so fearful of unhallowed approaches. But the truth is, they cast the spirituality of their profession behind their backs for the rest of the year, and Lent was the time of settling their accounts current with the church.

Thus far our researches for solid examples of our sacramental fasts and thanksgivings, have been fruitless. No one, surely, will hunt for them in the ages that follow. Degeneracy succeeded degeneracy: the genius of Christianity was forgotten by the multitude: Church services swelled into an enormous bulk: but the living spirit was fled and the mass of putrescence which remained behind,

served only to nurture and bring to his full size, "the son of perdition."

Passing by, therefore, the long and dreary reign of darkness and idolatry, we resume our inquiries at the æra of the reformation. But we shall be as much puzzled to find precedents here, as in the days of the Apostles. The pretensions of the Pope, and the corruptions of popery, were manfully rejected: the worship of God freed from profane incumbrances: the stupid blasphemy of *deified bread*, and all its mountebank superstition, exploded: every punctilio of the sacramental doctrine and rites severely discussed: but of a day of preparatory fasting and subsequent thanksgiving nobody dreamed. They were unknown to the good Waldenses; to Luther, to Calvin, to Melancthon, to Bucer, to Beza, and all the rest of the worthies who espoused the quarrel of the Lord against the mighty. There is not a vestige of them in those illustrious compends of evangelical doctrine which were framed when the lamp of reformation began to shine the brightest; and the churches were eminently favored with the spirit of judgment, and the spirit of burning. The HELVETIC, GALLICAN, ENGLISH, SCOTTISH, BELGIC, STRASBOURG, AUGSBOURG, SAXON, BOHEMIC, confessions, all treat of the supper, and almost all of fasting;

they were drawn up with the express design of separating the precious from the vile ; they speak particularly of self-examination, in order to worthy communicating ; they explain the nature, and point out the *seasons* of religious fasting ; but not a lisp of it as a needful preparative to the table of the Lord. Nay, the Belgic confession asserts roundly, “all the abuses and accursed inventions which men have added to the sacraments, and mingled with them, we justly reject as a real profanation ; and affirm, that all the godly are to be contented with that order, and those rites *alone*, which Christ and his Apostles have left us.” So that, in the view of these bold witnesses for truth, every thing added, as a necessary appendage to the manner which Christ and his Apostles have delivered to us of celebrating the sacraments, is an *abuse*, a *profanation*, an *accursed invention*. What would these honest disciples say, could they lift up their heads, and see whole bodies of Christians professing to walk in the track of the written word, and to preserve the best spirit of the reformation, stickling for observances, and those, too, as obligatory on conscience, which have no more authority from Christ or his Apostles, than the feast of Purim, or the fast of Lent ?

But what is still more in point, because it

comes nearer home, and may, therefore, have greater weight, is, that our numerous services about the holy supper are diametrically opposed to the current of public sentiment in the church of Scotland; and to her solemn, repeated enactments, from the commencement of the reformation, down to the establishment of the Westminster confession of faith.

This may startle some serious people who have not thoroughly examined the matter; but the fact is incontestible. For,

1. The confession of the English church at GENEVA, speaking of the sacraments, (Art. IV.) says, “neither must we, in the administration of these sacraments, follow man’s fancy; but as Christ *himself* hath ordained, so must they be ministered.”* This confession was received and approved by the church of Scotland.

2. The confession of faith of the Protestants in Scotland, drawn up in 1560, declares, (Art. XXII.) “that the sacraments be rightly ministered, we judge two things are requisite: the one that they be ministered by lawful ministers—the other, that they be ministered in such elements, and in such *sort* (form or manner) as God hath appointed; else we affirm that they cease to be the right sacraments of Christ Jesus.”†

* Collection of Confessions. 8vo. p. 14.

† Coll. of Conf. p. 36.

3. The first book of discipline, composed in 1560, by several reformers, of whom JOHN KNOX was one, presented to the great council on the 20th of May that same year; signed by all the first reformers, January 17th, 1561,* speaks only of the “*preaching of the word*,” to “precede the ministration of the sacraments.” And enjoins, that “in the due administration of the sacraments, *all things* should be done according to the word: nothing being added nor yet diminished. The sacrament should be ministered *after the order of the kirk of Geneva*. All ceremonies and rites invented by men should be abolished; and the simple word followed in *all* points.” (Art. II.)†

Nor were these views entertained only in that remote and difficult period. They have again and again been formally avowed by the church of Scotland when she was in the zenith of her spiritual prosperity and glory. For,

4. The national covenant, as approved by the General Assembly in 1638, and 1639; and subscribed by persons of all ranks in 1639, adopts the confession of 1560, and declares all who “refuse the administration of the holy sacraments as they were then ministered, (1560) to be no members of the true and holy

* Erskine, p. 276.

† Coll. of Conf. p. 43.

kirk of Christ Jesus, within the realm of SCOTLAND.”*

5. An act of the Assembly passed 1638, after referring to several public instruments, finds that “whatever gesture or *rite* cannot stand with the administration of the sacraments as they were administered in 1567, and were ministered ever since the reformation till the year 1618, must be condemned as a *rite added* to the true ministration of the sacraments, without the word of God; and as a *rite or tradition*, brought in without, or against the word of God, or doctrine of this reformed kirk.”†

It is very true, that these acts are levelled immediately against corruptions which had taken place in the manner of distributing and receiving the sacramental elements; but it is evident that they lay down an universal rule condemning the imposition of rites and observances in divine worship, which have no foundation in the word of God; and thus conclude, with great energy, against those corruptions as particular instances contravening the general principle.

From these facts, it appears that the church of Scotland, from the dawn of the reformation

* Coll. of Conf. p. 99.

† Coll. of Conf. p. 200.

till 1638, indulged but one sentiment as to the administration of the sacraments, viz., that it is not to be encumbered with any rites or traditions contrary to, or *beside*, the written word. And what was in her eyes, the scriptural mode of administering them, is sufficiently ascertained by her prescribing conformity in this matter with the church of Geneva. *But in that church, a day of fasting before, and of thanksgiving after, the sacrament of the supper, were never heard of.* And hence, it is clear, that the prohibitions of the acts quoted above, extend, in their spirit, to these no less than to other uncommanded observances.

But we have not yet done. The General Assembly, in 1645, directing the method of procedure in dispensing the Lord's supper, positively *precluded* these days: enacting that there be *one sermon* of preparation, delivered in the ordinary place of public worship, upon the day immediately preceding. That before the serving of the tables, there be only one sermon delivered to those who are to communicate, and that in the same kirk there be one sermon of thanksgiving after the communion is ended."* This last sermon could not have been intended for a week-day; because the assembly evidently passed their act to accom-

* Erskine, p. 281.

moderate their manner of celebrating the supper to the directory which they had just before adopted, and which knows nothing of such a service.*

If we now repair to the Westminster confession of faith, and directory for public worship, we shall meet with evidence enough to destroy every surviving doubt.

The directory, on the head of the supper, and the preparatory service, not only does not enjoin a fast-day, but does not even insist on a week-day sermon. Its words are, “Where this sacrament cannot with convenience be frequently administered, it is requisite that public warning be given the Sabbath day before the administration thereof: and that *either then, or on some day of that week, something concerning that ordinance, and the due preparation thereunto, and participation thereof, be taught.*” Nothing is here required, but that *something* concerning the ordinance and preparation for it be taught; and it is left discretionary whether this shall be spoken on the Sabbath preceding, or at any other time in the course of that week.† It is, indeed, pretended that the

* The directory was adopted in their 10th session, and the above act passed in the 14th.

† In strict compliance with the directory, the preparatory discourse is delivered to the congregation at New York, on the Friday evening preceding the communion.

directory does, by implication at least, suppose the necessity of the previous fast-day; because it declares public solemn fasting to be a duty which God requireth when special blessings are to be sought and obtained; and because it considers the administration of the sacraments as a *special* occasion, which affords matter of special petitions and thanksgivings; whence it is inferred, that the directory contemplates the holy supper as one of those occasions on which God requireth public solemn fasting.

Had not this argument been used often, and not without an air of triumph, time would have been worse than misspent in giving it an answer; but as the case stands, it must be seriously examined and put to silence and to shame. This will be effectually done by quoting *fairly* the passages to which it alludes, and adding one or two observations.

Concerning fasting, the directory says, "when some great and notable judgments are either inflicted upon a people, or apparently imminent; or by some extraordinary provocations notoriously deserved: as also when some special blessing is to be sought and obtained; public solemn fasting (which is to continue the whole day) is a duty that God expecteth from that nation or people."

Under the head of *prayer after sermon*, it says, “whereas, at the administration of the sacraments, the holding public fasts and days of thanksgiving, and other special occasions which may afford matter of special petitions and thanksgivings, it is requisite to express somewhat in our public prayers—every minister is herein to apply himself in his prayer, before or after sermon, to those occasions.”

Whoever finds, in either of these passages, or in both of them, an injunction of our sacramental fast, certainly finds in the kernel what never was in the shell. Can any man persuade himself, that the Westminster divines would have taken such a crooked method of inculcating it, and not utter a syllable about it, either in the directory, confession, or catechisms, when expressly treating of the supper, and of the due preparation?

But, beside this general reflection, which one would think sufficient, I say,

1st. That the words “special blessing,” “special occasion,” “special petitions,” on which the whole stress of the argument is laid, prove nothing at all: because the term “special” is indefinite. Its precise meaning must be ascertained from its relation to the subject of discourse. When applied to the Lord’s supper, it merely distinguishes this from other

duties : when applied to the occasions of fasting or thanksgivings, it distinguishes them from the ordinary occurrences of providence. Accordingly, the supper, with regard to its peculiar character, is called a “special occasion,” but when compared with the occasions of public fasting and thanksgiving, is reckoned a part of *ordinary* worship.* The paragraph last cited from the directory no more determines the supper to be an occasion of public fasting, than a public fast to be an occasion of communicating ; but mentions both as occasions of special prayer : that is, of prayer *adapted* to the nature of these exercises. And in what sense the word special is used in its connection with public fasting, the appendix to the directory has made plain enough. “It is lawful and necessary, upon *special emergent occasions*, to separate a day or days for public fasting or thanksgiving, as the several *eminent* and *extraordinary* dispensations of God’s providence shall administer cause and opportunity to his people.” No one, surely, will call the administration of the supper, an “eminent and extraordinary dispensation” of providence.

2d. In one of the places cited from the directory, there happens to be a small letter which completely ruins the cause the citation

* Conf. ch xxi.

was intended to support. It does not say, "in the administration of the sacrament," but "sacraments," including baptism, and making this to be an occasion no less special than the supper. So that if the argument, shape it as you please, prove any thing, it proves that the directory prescribes a public fast as often as a child is baptized. Unless this be admitted, the foundation is swept away, and the fabric reared upon it, tumbles to the ground. So much for the DIRECTORY.

The CONFESSION OF FAITH, which treats, in ch. xxix. of the Lord's supper; and the LARGER CATECHISM, which points out, with great care, the various exercises that should precede and follow it, (Ques. 171, 175,) do neither of them contain an iota of the doctrine of a previous fast, or a subsequent day of thanksgiving.

But the matter is decisively settled by the twenty-first chapter of the confession, which treats of *religious worship*. In section V., "the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments," are classed with reading the scriptures, preaching and hearing of the word, and singing of psalms; and are declared to be, equally with them, "parts of the *ordinary* religious worship of God;" whereas "solemn fasts and thanksgivings" are classed with

“religious oaths and vows,” are declared to belong to “special occasions,” and are thus entirely separated from any immediate connection with the Lord’s supper. There is no getting over this. You must either pronounce the Lord’s supper an extraordinary duty, or public fasting and thanksgiving ordinary ones; and, in both cases, you overthrow the doctrine of the confession. It is needless to say more; the contradiction is direct and full; nor has the most ingenious sophistry one subterfuge left.

It is, therefore, a stubborn fact, however illy it may be received, that the Lord’s supper, dispensed without fast-day, thanksgiving-day, or week-day sermon, would comply not only with the spirit, but with the letter of that very directory, which we ourselves have solemnly approved, as being substantially founded in the word of God; and that our present sacramental fast and thanksgiving days are in open hostility with the decision of that system, which we hold up to the world as exhibiting our genuine faith. And yet the least attempt to lay any of them aside, that is, to act up to our *own avowed principles*; to conform to *that* order which we profess to believe *according to the divine will*, is reproached as innovation and defection!!

But if these days are so destitute of every just authority, how were they introduced? Like all other unwarranted rites—by stealth. They originate, perhaps, in accident; they are continued without design; the popularity of a name recommends them to respect; one imitates another; and thus, or ever we are aware, they glide into the worship of God, and usurp the dignity of his institutions. This is the ordinary progress of corruption. The readiness with which men leave divine appointments for their own fancies, is proportioned to their reluctance in leaving their own fancies for divine appointments.

But in whatever manner the sacramental fasts and thanksgivings came into use, they are clearly of *modern* date. We have already seen that no traces of them can be found in the apostolical churches, or in those of the reformation. Their existence in Scotland, is certainly later than 1645, as is manifest from the directory for worship, and from the act of the general assembly quoted above. It even appears that there was no fast-day as low down as the year 1657, ten years after the adoption of the confession, and twelve after that of the directory. It is not denied that week-day sermons had sometimes been preached after the communion. That glorious

one of the renowned JOHN LIVINGSTON, from which near five hundred persons reckoned their conversion to God, or their establishment in his ways, was delivered on a Monday after the sacrament, in 1630. But these were entirely *occasional*; and the event at the kirk of *Shots* was “the more remarkable, that one, after much reluctance, *by a special and unexpected providence*, was called to preach that sermon on the Monday, which *then was not usually practiced*.*

It is also true, that in 1657, although the fast-day had not yet come into fashion, services accompanying the communion were enormously multiplied: But this was with many, and very justly, a source of serious discontent. As the account is little known, and may be useful, the chief of it is here given from Dr. Erskine’s dissertation, as he took it from the author of “*Dan in Beersheba*.”† “The general assembly, in the year 1645, did establish an order for preventing confusion in the celebration of the sacrament, with which *the whole church* were satisfied. Yet, since our

* Fleming’s Fulfilling of the Scripture, vol. I. p. 400.

† This writer’s authorities are two books published in London, 1657, and entitled, *Uldericus, Veridicus, sive de Statu Ecclesiæ Scoticanæ*, and a *True Representation of the Rise, Progress, and State of the Divisions in the Church of Scotland*.

divisions, our dissenting brethren* have taken up a new and irregular way of dispensing the holy supper, whereby they have turned it either into a theatrical pomp, or into the *Popish* error of *opus operatum*. They have a great many ministers assisting them; six or seven; nay, sometimes double that number, whose congregations are generally left destitute of preaching that day. Every day of their meeting, viz., Saturday, the Lord's day, and Monday, (*N. B. they had then no fast days*) many of these ministers do preach successively one after another; so that three or four, or sometimes more, do preach at their *preparation*, and as many on the Monday following. And on the Sabbath, sometimes three or four preach before they go to the action, besides those who preach to the multitude of the people who cannot be contained in the church. Never before were there so many sermons in any church, in so short a time. These practices, as they are a clear violation of the order unanimously established in the church, and do occasion great animosity and alienation of simple people against those ministers who will not imitate those irregular courses; so untested observers perceive a clear design in all

* It refers to the dispute between the resolutioners and protesters.

this, to set up themselves as the only zealous and pious people, worthy to be trusted and followed in our public differences: which, if it be not an injury to that sacred ordinance, and an improving that which should be a bond of unity and communion, to be a wedge to drive and fix a rent, let the judicious and sober judge.”* How far some of these reflections are applicable to our own circumstances, is left to the reader. But as to the narrative, it may not be unworthy of remark, *first*, that the *whole church* was satisfied with the order established by the assembly in 1645; that is, *without either fast or thanksgiving days*. *Secondly*, that the multitude of week-day services shortly after introduced, were opposed both as *new and irregular*. *Thirdly*, that they were considered as turning the celebration of the holy communion into a kind of *theatrical pomp*—and, *fourthly*, that their effects were most baneful. There are few so hardy as not to condemn these abuses: and yet they are not more indefensible than some usages which are now viewed as sacred. Nor is there a doubt, that had they continued to our day, it would have been quite as difficult to get rid of them.

On the whole, from the obscurity which covers the rise of the sacramental fasts, and

the disorder which at first reigned in the other extraordinary services, it seems evident that they crept into the church *by degrees*; that *custom*, regardless of the reason of things, and equally tenacious of the wrong as of the right, transmitted them to posterity; and that undistinguishing habit, and the belief of the cradle, have numbered them with the ordinances of JESUS CHRIST.*

* When the Scottish confession of 1560, was publicly discussed and approved, three Popish noblemen, the Earl of Athol, and Lords Somerville and Bothwick, dissented upon this ground, *we will believe as our fore fatheris belevit*. KNOX's *Historie*, p. 253, fol. There is too much of this Popish leaven fermenting in every corner of the reformation.

LETTER VII.

The Evils occasioned by Sacramental Fasts and Thanksgivings.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

MY *last* proposition concerning our sacramental fasts and thanksgivings is, that *they are attended with great and serious evils.*

1. *They establish a term of religious communion, which has no scriptural sanction.*

Christ Jesus hath specified in his word the principles, duties, and conduct of those to whom the privileges of his house belong. His decisions, then, are the only rule of appreciating character, and ascertaining the conditions of Christian fellowship; and it is high presumption in any man, or society of men, to extend or abridge them. Now, as he hath not enjoined, either directly or by implication, a day of fasting before, or of thanksgiving after, the commemoration of his death, no churches under heaven have a right to require them. Yet *they are* required, for they are judged *ne-*

cessary, and to omit them is deemed *censurable*. This is to erect them, at once, into laws of conscience and laws of Christ; for nothing is necessary in his church but what he has commanded, nor any thing censurable but what he has forbidden. They are, therefore, to all intents and purposes, made terms of communion, and will deprive of the privileges of his house those who cannot feel themselves bound in conscience to observe them. And what is this? It is nothing less than to impeach the wisdom, and usurp the authority, of the Lord our lawgiver. If he will resent the unfaithfulness of those who throw down the hedge of his vineyard, and lay it open to the beasts of the field, he will equally resent the arrogance of those, who, by additions of their own, so narrow the door as to exclude his sheep.

2. As the evangelical institution of the supper does not contain our customary appendages, *the insisting upon them is reprehensible as an unwarranted addition to that part of divine worship.*

The ordinance, as Christ left it, is simplicity itself; but we have made it a very different thing from what the gospel describes it. We have encumbered it with a pompous ceremonial which the “Lord never commanded, neither came it into his mind.”

It may, perhaps, be said, that this is a rash and unreasonable charge; that both fasting and thanksgiving are duties which God hath prescribed; and, therefore, that we do not *add* to his worship.

This is a mere evasion, and a miserable one. God, indeed, requires the observance of days of fasting and thanksgiving, but does he require it whenever the supper is to be dispensed? We are no more authorized to join what he has not joined, than to coin new modes of worship. The *connection* between the supper and the fast and thanksgiving days is a *human device*, and the *compound* is as real an addition to God's appointments as ever human presumption ventured upon. Let me not, however, be misunderstood. I have already conceded that duties, which have no necessary connection, *may* occasionally coincide in point of *time*. But if the coincidence result not from God's providence, but from man's pleasure; if it then be held up as a *rule* of conduct; if it set aside any part of scriptural obedience; if it be employed as an engine of superstition; it becomes, in the strictest sense of the word, a *corruption*, and a corruption of which it is impossible to calculate the effects. The same principle which justifies one deviation from the simplicity of evangelical worship, will justify

a thousand ; and it is of small moment in what *form* the deviation presents itself. An arbitrary connection between duties is as exceptionable and dangerous as any other ; because, independently on its mischief as a precedent, there is no defining its extent. Whenever men assume this power, they set an engine to work, which, without increasing or diminishing the *number* of God's institutions, may deface every part of his worship, and render it as ridiculous and contemptible as infidels or devils could wish it.

3. The multiplicity of our week-day services *is incompatible with such a frequency of communion as is our indispensable duty.*

If just regard were shown in this particular to the dying precept of our dear Lord Jesus, and all the extra days of worship kept up, no congregations either would or should submit to the burden. The tribute of time, which would be withdrawn from their ordinary occupations, would be much too great for any who "eat their bread in the sweat of their brow." This alone might convince that these days cannot be agreeable to the divine will, for they would render the New Testament worship more oppressive than the Jewish ritual. Yet they may not be touched. And the consequence is exactly what might be ex-

pected, the memorial of the love of Jesus is a rare occurrence. These very days have invariably defeated every exertion to bring back the usages of the church to Apostolical simplicity. Had it not been for them, communions would have been much more frequent, both in the church of Scotland and in the denominations which have sprung from it. The best of men have lamented, and entreated, and struggled, but all in vain. These observances repressed the spirit of generous and scriptural reform. Prejudice took the alarm; steeled her heart against conviction; stopped her ears to ex-postulation; drowned the voice of reason and scripture in the cry of innovation and defection; the genius of the gospel may be violated; the commands of Christ may be trodden under foot; the monument of his great sacrifice pushed out of sight; but these days which he never appointed; to which the church, founded by his Apostles, was an entire stranger; these must not lose an atom of their importance or their pomp. And can men have the hardihood to call over this adulterine zeal the name of Jesus, and palm it on the world for *faithfulness* to his cross?

4. Through the accumulation of week-day services, the dispensation of the supper, seldom as it happens, *is almost impracticable to*

any minister without the aid of some of his brethren.

Is it credible that Jesus Christ hath imposed on his ministers a labor which usual health and strength are unable to sustain? Is there a text, a line, a word, in the whole Bible, to show that one part of his family should be deprived of their food, because another part are celebrating their feast? Let none plead necessity, and the duty of consulting each other's comfort. Convenience, I know, must yield to necessity. But we must first be sure the necessity is *real*. In the present case, it is obviously one of our own seeking; and the evil is only aggravated by sanctifying it with the name of a providential call. We would show our wisdom by leaving God's providence in his own hand.

5. Our sacramental fasts and thanksgivings not only destroy, as hath been proved, the sound distinction between ordinary and extraordinary duties, but *tend to banish altogether both the principal and practice of scriptural fasting and thanksgiving.*

As to the *principle*. By wedding these exercises with the sacrament of the supper, you tie down to certain periods, what the Bible has tied down to *no* periods. You attempt to fix the "times which the Father hath put in

his own power.” You regulate the seasons of fasting and thanksgiving, not, as your directory has wisely done, by providential dispensations, but by human agreements. You lift yourselves up into the throne of God, and determine for him, instead of allowing him to determine for you, when those duties are proper. Now, this is directly subversive of their very principle and use. In the common acts of his government, and the stated ordinances of his worship, Jehovah hath established a permanent testimony for his supremacy and our dependence. But to quicken our sense of his continual agency, of his sovereign rule, and of our accountableness to him, he is pleased occasionally to make bare his holy arm, and, by special interpositions, to proclaim a present God. This revives our languid sensibility, awakens our slumbering cares, and leads directly either to solemn humiliation or exceeding joy before him. To join these exercises statedly, with any stated part of worship, is to disregard the very thing which *makes* them duties at all; to cherish in the rising generation an ignorance, and to breed in the risen one an oblivion of their primary end, is to wrest from the ETERNAL a means which he employs to teach the rebellious that he “sitteth King forever,” and of which he

hath reserved the application to himself. In vain do you pretend to explain the nature and occasions of fasting. Mankind will never profit from doctrine which is a visible and perpetual contradiction to practice.

If the principle of extraordinary duties be overlooked, the scriptural performance of them cannot be preserved. Between them and their occasions, God hath created a beautiful correspondence, to which man cannot furnish a substitute. If *you* call us to such duties, and *Divine Providence* does not, we cannot enter into their spirit ; because the occasion of them does not exist. And as you cannot command the latter, you cannot infuse the former. You can hardly expect any thing else than dull formality. And the Lord knoweth that this is too sadly the character of many of our sacramental fasts. Instead of deep meltings of heart, they are little better than dry and sapless ceremony. Not to mention, that, being fasts in name more than in truth, they are not seldom a mockery of the Holy One of Israel.

But this is not all. Our custom at the communion may operate as a prohibition to fasting and thanksgiving on their proper occasions. The providence of God may call to them, but the supper is in prospect, and they must be

deferred till then. On the other hand, the supper may be scarcely over, before a necessity for them occurs, and then, they cannot be attended to, because we have just been engaged in them. This is no fiction : it has actually happened, and that not once or twice. And it deserves any other name but reverence to God's institutions ; for it is saying, upon the matter, " We will have our own way ; we *will* fast when he does *not* require us ; and we will *not* fast when he *does*." Can we lift our eyes to heaven and look for a blessing, while we are guilty of such preposterous and headstrong disobedience ?

6. Our numerous services about the holy supper *create a pernicious distinction between the sacraments.*

Being seals of the same covenant ; representing the same blessings ; and ordained by the same authority ; one would suppose that they are to be approached with equal reverence and equal preparation. Yet we must have a public fast before, and a public thanksgiving after the one ; while nobody dreams of either in connection with the other. Who taught us to make this difference ? It is not in the word of God. From Genesis to the Revelation, not a passage can be alleged for public fastings and thanksgivings at the ad-

ministration of the supper, which is not equally friendly to them at the administration of baptism. It does not arise from the nature of these ordinances: the approach to God in both, is equally near, and equally solemn.*

Christian reader, do we not lament the ignorant and sinful conduct of many professors towards the sacraments? They refuse to glorify Jesus by commemorating his death, but are offended if they be not allowed to present their children in baptism. They startle at the thought of the one, but rush without concern to the other. Whence proceeds the profanation? From various causes, no doubt. But it merits consideration, whether we have not materially contributed to it by our unscriptural appendages to the holy supper. These, by throwing around it an air of superior sacredness and awe, have depreciated baptism in the eyes of men, and have led them to view it as less serious in itself, and less dangerous to be sported with. They suppose much to be requisite for the former, and little, if any thing,

* If any should argue that these exercises are proper in one case, and not in the other, because the members of the congregation at large, are in the one engaged, and in the other, only a very few at most, they are requested to solve the problem, *How many communicants are requisite to a public fast?* If this be a duty at all, the number of communicants is of no importance. It is as necessary in a communion of two, as of ten thousand.

for the latter. Hence they demand the one with great confidence ; and when questioned about their neglect of the other, tell you they are unprepared. •

While this distinction emboldens the careless, it disheartens the feeble-minded. Not a few who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, are afraid to touch the symbols of his body and blood. They would go to his table ; but when they think of attempting it, their courage fails : the spirit of bondage bows them down ; and instead of feeling like children drawing nigh to a most compassionate father, they feel like criminals dragged to the tribunal of a judge. Why this unhappiness ? Beyond dispute, in part from the trappings which have been hung around the table of love, and from the unwarranted manner in which even good men have permitted themselves to speak of it. Between both, it has been made an object of dread. Its tender persuasions, its rich consolations, have been too little regarded ; and even to believers, it has been arrayed in terrors, and fenced with thunder. Nay, Christian reader, we have exalted one sacrament at the expense of the other ; we have thrown a stumbling block before a carnal world ; and have countenanced a ruinous departure from equal and vigorous discipline.

7. Let not the assertion be deemed too hardy, that our manner of celebrating the supper is *unfriendly to pure and evangelical devotion*.

Ordinances are desirable, not on their own account, but as means by which communion with Christ Jesus is promoted, and his covenant-mercies enjoyed. Believers know that they grow in grace in proportion as they live by faith upon their divine Redeemer: and that nothing is more fatal to their peace, nor casts them down more rapidly from holy attainments, than a legal dependence on duties. Now the question is certainly worth asking, and worth answering, whether the pomp of our communions does not bear strong marks of legality, and has not a tendency to engender and nurture it in the minds of men? Else, why this pomp at all? Why not the same simplicity here, as in other ordinances? The grace of Jesus is quite as sufficient for this as for those. But the language of our supernumerary days of worship is, that, however sufficient it may be, it is not so free as on other occasions. Nor is the opinion of their legal tendency mere surmise. Would to God it were! Every one who is not grossly ignorant of himself will own the proneness of corruption to rest in frames, duties, anything but the grace that is in Christ Jesus: and es-

pecially, to idolize whatever has “a show of will-worship and humility.” That this hath been the fruit of our additions to the scriptural mode of celebrating the Lord’s supper, daily facts make but too apparent. What means this religious parade, when that blessed exercise draws near? Whence this unusual sternness? these sudden austerities? Whence that mortified air which vanishes like a phantom, and never returns but with a returning communion? Why do so many plead for infrequent communion, on the pretext that they cannot otherwise be suitably prepared? Why do so many abstain from communicating, even at the periods which themselves approve, if they happen to be prevented from keeping the fast day? The plain interpretation of it is, “had I kept the fast, I had been well qualified: but now I am altogether unfit.” But why not communicate without it? “The service is peculiarly holy: great preparation is very necessary, and very difficult.” And what is the obvious inference? *We must work the harder.* Ah! is there no legality in all this? Yes verily. And so powerful is it in many, that not all their love to Jesus Christ, not all their zeal for his name, not all the allurements of his grace, not all the majesty of his authority, will preserve them from the de-

liberate violation of his command, lest they should transgress--the tradition of the elders!

8. Our sacramental fasts and thanksgivings *involve us perpetually in self-contradiction.*

We speak with great confidence, of lifting up a banner for truth ; of not believing every spirit, but trying the spirits whether they are of God. We reject, in a mass, the corruptions of Popery and prelacy. We renounce the religious observance of Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, &c., and the festivals in honor of saints and saintesses, as superstitious and inconsistent with gospel-worship, how graceful soever to the anti-Christian calender. The reason of their being laid aside by the Westminster Assembly, and of their being disowned by ourselves, is their want of divine authority. “ Festival-days, vulgarly called *holy-days*, **HAVING NO WARRANT IN THE WORD OF GOD,** are not to be continued.” The reason is sound and irresistible : but the mortification is, that with this profession in our mouths, we gravely declare by our practice, and especially by justifying it, that sacramental fast and thanksgiving days, *which have no warrant in the word of God,* **ARE** to be continued.

Talk no more, then, to a Papist or an Episcopalian, of his uncommanded holy-days. He

will reply that you have no objection to holy-days, provided they be of your own appointing. Question him not about the fast on Good Friday, before Easter Sunday. He will question you in his turn, about your Thursday or Friday fast before, what he would call, Sacrament Sunday. Ask not for *his* warrant from the Bible. He will retort, by asking for *yours*. He will produce quite as many, and quite as good proofs for *Lent*, as you can for your fast-days; and infinitely more examples. On the ground of *decency*, he will keep up with you: on the ground of *devotion*, outstrip you: and on the ground of *antiquity*, leave you out of sight. Here, then, you are reduced to a dilemma. You must either allow his days, or give up your own. They stand and fall together. It is superlative inconsistency to inveigh against the one, and defend the other. In vain do you quirk and shuffle: the absurdity is glaring. You are fastened down, nor can you disentangle yourself by all the arts of controversial chicanery. If, therefore, we venture to attack corruptions of divine worship among others, a skillful adversary will combat us with our own weapons, and turn the edge of our testimony against our own bowels. We shall be incessantly rebuffed by the stinging, but

merited taunt : “Physician ! heal thyself. Hypocrite ! first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.” In such humiliating circumstances, it is a poor subterfuge to exclaim against the defections and incorrigibleness of the times ; and to console ourselves as being reproached for Christ. This is not witnessing for truth ; but putting a cheat upon ourselves. The religion of Christ is not answerable for our folly : nor hath his reproach any affinity with reproach for inconsistency. The alternative, Christian brethren, is decisive : We must either act up to our profession, or sit down self-condemned, and silently bear our shame.

If we would have a good conscience, and an unblushing face ; if we would present an invulnerable front to every foe, let us dare to acknowledge and to rectify what is amiss in ourselves. Let us not shrink from the scriptural test. If anything which custom has taught us to value as fine gold, should prove to be dross—to the dross with it ! Let us have the Christian magnanimity to say, **PERISH THE TRADITIONS OF MEN ! THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD BE HONORED !** Then may we expect his blessing ; and we shall no longer

injure his truth, nor expose our profession to ridicule.*

* Should it be demanded, how a week-day service of any kind, preparatory to the supper, is more defensible than public fasts and thanksgivings, or more consistent with the foregoing reasonings? I answer, Preaching the word, unlike those exercises, is an *ordinary* part of God's worship; and, if it do not displace any other duty, can never be *unseasonable*. But should any assert a previous week-day sermon to be essential, either to the right administration of the supper, or the right preparation for it—should it be considered as obligatory, *by divine authority*, on the conscience—should it jostle other duties out of their places—should it be a pillar of will-worship—should it lead to erroneous notions of the sacraments, breeding a *false* reverence for the one, and sinful slight of the other. Could it be proved to have all, or any of these effects, the author would be the first to condemn and reject it.

LETTER VIII.

Some Popular Pleas for Sacramental Fasts and Thanksgivings, briefly Considered.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN

AFTER all that has been said, will any still advocate our sacramental fasts and thanksgivings, by pleading that “they are of long standing in the church—are a laudable custom—are well meant—have been practiced by great and good men—are helpful to devotion—are either sin or duty ; and if not the former, then certainly the latter ?”

A word or two to each of these pretenses. As to their *antiquity*, I remark,

1. It is not true: we have already proved them to be quite modern; an innovation of yesterday.

2. Antiquity is a wretched standard of truth; the abominations of popery are more ancient than they, by several centuries.

That they are a *laudable* custom is begging the question, for it is the very thing in dispute. Beside, custom is not to be the rule of wor-

ship. Many bad customs have crept into the church of God : and if their being *once* customs is a reason for their being *always* customs, the reformers acted very foolishly in throwing so many of them away. If it be not a scriptural custom, the longer it has stood the worse ; the more mischief it has done ; and the greater need for its immediate abolition. The injury done by custom to purity is the subject of old and heavy complaint. “ Our Lord Christ called himself truth, not custom,” saith Tertullian.

Their being *well-meant* is no better apology than the former. Good intentions do not sanctify a fault. The worst of things have sometimes been done with the best design. Zeal for God, not according to knowledge, has been a greater pest to his church than all the openly wicked schemes of Satan and his agents.

But *great and good men have practiced them*—And the argument will be conclusive whenever it is proved that great and good men never do wrong. Till then, we must look more at God’s word than at their example. Great and good men have observed “ days, and months, and times, and years ;” and have used rites and ceremonies, the very mention of which, as parts or appendages of worship,

would excite among us just and universal indignation. Their errors were not so much their own as the errors of their day and place. They followed the fashion merely because it was the fashion, without serious examination, or perhaps any examination at all. This is undoubtedly the fact with respect to our sacramental fasts and thanksgivings; not one in a hundred of those who keep them having ever inquired into their reason and obligation. And this is the best apology for those worthies whose conduct is now held up as a model for ours.

But the principle of this argument is utterly intolerable. It puts an everlasting stop to reformation. Had our ancestors acted upon it, we would have been still within the precincts of that synagogue of Satan, the church of Rome. They were more enlightened. Could they hear us allege their example in vindication of an unscriptural usage, they would be the first to resent the impiety. Not wishing us to be followers of them farther than they were of Christ, they would disown us as a spurious brood, and not the genuine sons of the Reformation. We have made miserable proficiency if we have not yet learned that maxim of Christian independence, not to call any man our master upon earth.

Will it be pretended that the days in question are *helpful to devotion* ! This very pretext is urged in behalf of Christmas, and Good Friday, and Whitsunday, and Lent. This very pretext has been an inlet to a multitude of those abuses, which in the most profligate times inundated the church of God. Nothing so ridiculous, so monstrous, so profane, as to be denied its sanction. Pictures, penances, saint worship, crosses, images, and all the rest of the ungodly trumpery, find a sanctuary here. Devotion, forsooth, cannot be maintained by means which the Lord hath appointed ; but when to these men have added a host of their own inventions, they become wonderfully devout ! What rashness ! what presumption ! As if the great God were less concerned about his own worship than we ! As if he did not thoroughly know our frame, and what is necessary to cherish devout affection ! As if he had left his institutions imperfect, and we must mend them !

But, says an objector, the observance of these days is *either sin or duty* ; and if not the former, then certainly the latter.

As this argument appears to be a favorite with some, and one which, by involving their opponent in a perplexing dilemma, issues, they imagine, in their own certain and decisive tri-

umph ; it demands a more particular animadversion.

1. Then, the proposition that an act must be either sin or duty, is false and absurd. It is, no doubt, sinful to omit what is our duty to do, and duty to omit what is sinful to do. This, however, is nothing to the purpose ; for it is only saying that duty is duty, and sin is sin. But it is not true what the proposition asserts, that if a thing be not sin, it is necessarily duty. By this mode of arguing, you must own every thing to be duty which you cannot prove to be sin. For example ; you will not maintain that it would have been sin in the apostle Paul to have taken wages from the church of Corinth ; for he peremptorily affirms his right to it from the ordinance of God. Then it must have been his duty ; and in declining pecuniary support, he was chargeable with a breach of duty.

This same mode of arguing will convict not only the apostle of sin, but the Bible of error. Let us instance, in the vows spoken of, Deut. xxiii. 21, 23. These vows, saith the argument, were either sin or duty ; not sin, most assuredly, therefore duty ; and *not to vow* would have been *sinful*, because an omission of duty. But, saith the Lord, “ If thou forbear to vow, it shall be *no sin* in thee.” On the other hand, we might equally argue, *Not to vow* was either

sin or duty. Sin it could not be, for God said so ; therefore duty ; so that vowing, being the opposite of duty, would have been sinful ; whereas the Lord declared it lawful, and sin not to pay it. This argument has now done its work. It has proved the apostle a fool ; the word of God a contradiction ; and the same act to be, at the same time, and under the same circumstances, both sin and duty, and yet neither one nor the other.

2. Were the argument in itself a good one, it would do no service, but much harm, to the cause which it is brought to aid. The sacramental fasts and thanksgivings, you allege, are either duty or sin. That they are duty will not be granted. Then, says the terrible dilemma, they are *sin*. And what then ? Why, my practice, and the practice of my forefathers, in this particular, have all along been *sinful*. Ay, there's the rub. That the practice of *others* who differ from you is sinful you can readily admit, and perhaps warmly contend. But that such a charge should be laid at your *own door*, you cannot endure ; and at the very idea of extending it to your fathers, your displeasure kindles, and you exclaim, " Shall those godly men, the Bostons, the Moncrieffs, the Erskines, and the multitude of the faithful both in the church of Scotland and in

the secession, who have uniformly kept the fast and the thanksgiving days, be accused of conniving at a corruption of the Lord's worship? Away with such an unworthy reflection!"

But recollect, my friend. The position that these days must be either sin or duty is not *mine*; it is *your own*. As you never can prove them to be duty, the consequence of your principle is, that both yourself and others have sinned in observing them. It is only your own argument recoiling with the weight of a mill-stone upon yourself.

But taking it for granted that they cannot be sinful, as your pious ancestors observed them, and contending that they must be duty, you pronounce the omission of them to be sin; for that is not a *duty* which may be innocently neglected. Now this renders the matter unspeakably worse.

For, in order to remove an imputation from your forefathers, you throw it upon all the holy men of God who have lived in every age of the Christian church, till a little more than a century ago; and in every part of the globe excepting the spots of Great Britain and Ireland. For they never observed the sacramental fasts, and thanksgivings on which you insist. If you are resolved, then, to adhere to

the principle of their being either sin or duty, you have your choice whether you will own the sin to have been in your father's skirts, or will charge it on the whole church beside, with the apostles of Christ Jesus at their head.

This argument, therefore, embarrasses none but those who use it ; and as for the others, they ought never to be heard out of the mouth of a Protestant ; far less of any who have embraced the Westminster confessions and catechisms. With what eyes do men read these admirable composures ? or with what conscience avow them as containing their own faith ? Could a stranger believe that the identical pretexts on which they vindicate their sacramental fasts and thanksgivings, are enumerated in a part of this very system, which they profess to receive as founded on the word of God, and are there marked with the most unqualified reprobation ? Yet such is the fact ! Among the sins forbidden in the second commandment, as explained in the larger catechism, are “ all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, *adding to it*, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of *antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent*, or ANY OTHER PRETENCE WHATSOEVER.”*

Let us never forget, Christian brethren, that our notions of propriety, or the examples of men, though they seem to be pillars, have nothing to do in modeling Jehovah's worship. A jealous God, he will curse innovations, and overwhelm their apologists with the terror of that challenge, "Who hath **REQUIRED** this at your hands?"

Considering, therefore, that our sacramental fasts and thanksgivings have no divine warrant; that they are strangers in the church; that they are inconsistent with our profession; that they establish an unscriptural term of communion; that they tend to destroy the principle of public fasting and thanksgiving; to create a pernicious distinction between the sacraments; to cherish legal tempers in devotional exercises; and that they stand in the way of that great duty, the duty of frequently showing forth the death of our Redeemer—does it not become you, Christian brethren, to make a solemn pause, and to search whether, in this matter, *there be not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?*

LETTER IX.

Benefits of Scriptural Communion.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

THOSE who confound the idea of change with that of innovation, or whose convictions are overpowered by their fears, view the proposal for frequent communion as pregnant with alarming consequences. Their apprehensions, however sincere, are certainly ill-founded. On the contrary, we have reason to anticipate, from this very measure, the most desirable and salutary effects.

1. *We shall enjoy the consolation of having performed a duty much and long neglected.*

In the hour of retirement and reflection, an exercised believer can hardly persuade himself, in the face of all the considerations which have been set before him, that one or two communions in the year correspond with the will of Christ, with the end of his memorial, or with his own profession. His heart, in spite of apologies, will smite him; it will tell him, that a Saviour's death merits not such forget-

fulness; nor will all the week-day pageantry silence its murmurs. Unable to show a clear warrant for his appendages to the supper, and conscious that they supplant an obedience, otherwise easy, to his Lord's command, his confidence will waver, and a shade pass over his cheerfulness.

By communicating after the primitive model, in reviving its frequency, and lopping off the redundancies of human fancy, this source of disquietude will be dried up. Our Master's memorial restored to its just respect; the reproach of disregard to his dying precept wiped away; the excellence of his *simple* institutions *practically* asserted; our "keeping of the feast" more pure, because more scriptural—will be sublime attainments. They will repay, a thousandfold, the sacrifice of adverse prejudice and habit. Singleness of heart, in conforming to the obvious intentions of our Lord Jesus, will infuse into our obedience a vigor, and into our privileges a delight, which are vainly expected from conformity to the devices of men, and which can be appreciated by those alone who have smarted from the sting of a misgiving conscience.

2. *A harmony, at present impossible, will be established in our system of public worship.*

God is the God of order; and his word,

which is the rule of Christian order, hath referred every duty to its proper place ; ordinary duties to ordinary occasions ; and duties extraordinary to occasions extraordinary. But our sacramental fast and thanksgiving days have reversed this order, by wedding extraordinary duties with ordinary occasions. Now, if our arrangement be right, that of the Bible must be wrong. But as no Christian can impeach the latter, it must be admitted, not only that the former is faulty, but that dissolving the unnatural union between ordinary occasions and extraordinary duties, and reserving public fasting and thanksgiving for the seasons to which the scripture hath assigned them, viz. *providential emergencies*, will be a needful and a great reform. This will indeed curtail, by more than two-thirds, the existing week-day observances, and reduce the supper of the Lord to a very simple thing. Exactly what it should be ! Christ left it a very simple thing. By making it otherwise, men have only spoiled it ; and be it remembered, that simplicity is the glory of *all* evangelical worship. It may have few charms for carnal professors ; it may appear to them ignoble and sordid : but in proportion as it characterizes a church is “ the beauty of the Lord our God upon” her. And

who will not count *that* beauty our honor and our blessedness?

3. *Our judicial profession will be rescued from charges which it is now difficult, if not impossible, to repel.*

While we maintain that the feast of the supper is *frequently* to be celebrated, and keep it only *twice in a year*—that communicating is an ordinary, and fasting an extraordinary duty, and yet blend them in our practice—that holy days, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be observed, and insist upon the religious observance of days which have no such warrant—it requires uncommon assurance, or betrays contemptible weakness, to vaunt our own steadfastness, and bewail the departure of others from their avowed principles. This may render us objects of derision or of pity, but not of respect. We must lie under the suspicion, if not the reproach of hypocrisy, because our pretensions are unsupported by our conduct. But if, in the hope of teaching others, we set out with teaching ourselves—if we *exemplify* our doctrines by the severe application of them to our own church, rectifying *her* mistakes and banishing *her* corruptions—it will be manifest to the world that we contend not for the pre-eminence of party, but for the claims of truth. Such honesty will throw a

lustre round our character, and imprint a majesty upon our testimony, for which the usual clamor and acrimony would be too much honored in being called a miserable substitute. Passion would be soothed and prejudice allured. Men would listen with candor to the expostulations of conscience. We should have the praise of consistency, if not of success. And though we might fail to convince an opponent, we should at least command his esteem.

4. *Frequent and simple communions will probably purge the church of unworthy members.*

There is not a greater nuisance to Christianity than men who usurp its name without its influence ; who give to Christ the vapor of the lips, and to mammon the solid homage of the heart. They are a perpetual mildew on the blossoms, a death-frost about the roots of social piety. In any denomination, one such professor is one too many ; though entire freedom from them never has been, and never may be, the happiness of any earthly connection. In the little family of the Master himself, a devil occupied the seat of an apostle. Highly favored the church which has the fewest of them, and in which their numbers are diminishing ! Perhaps there could not be devised a more effectual expedient for getting rid of

them, than employing them in spiritual work. With abundance of formality, they may attend to the notorious *externals* of religion: and as a bribe to conscience, and a set-off to character, they may have no objection to the communion, *if it be not too often*. Once or twice a year will do. But strip this precious ordinance of the additions which nurture legality, or flatter pride: let it be as plain as the Bible made it, and as frequent as a believer needs it: let there be nothing to render it impressive, but its subject; or alluring, but its spirituality; and mark the consequence. The formal zealot will cool. Novelty, decency, example, may secure his compliance for a while; but it will be strange if his impatience do not at last get the ascendancy. Without affection to Jesus Christ, he will grow tired of his supper. Without a principle of spiritual life, he will count spiritual worship intolerable: the more spiritual, the more intolerable: and the holy communion most intolerable of all. His soul will loathe the heavenly manna, and by degrees he will drop off. It is not asserted that this would be the course of every formalist. Of some it more than probably would. And every one who should thus become a self-detector, would be a clear deduction from the

mass of enmity, in a particular church, to the interest of truth and holiness.

5. *A blessed fruit of frequent communions would be the promotion of brotherly love.*

In nothing is the religion of Jesus more dishonored, than in the want of that kind affection which ought to subsist between the heirs of a common salvation. No trait of moral character is in itself more amiable or excellent; none more ornamental to the gospel of Christ; none more powerfully recommended by his example; more peremptorily enjoined by his authority; more solemnly insisted upon in his word, as a test of profession; than the grace of love. And the time *has been*, when it formed the chief distinction of a disciple. In those days of primitive glory which we commend so much, and imitate so little, the mortified, yet admiring pagan, could not forbear to exclaim, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" Alas! the sad reverse! Professors of every name, should they agree in nothing else, agree in forgetting the lesson of love. To judge from facts, one would suppose that we are commanded not to "put away," but to cherish, "all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, with all malice." For it is too evident, that amid the lust of pre-eminence, and

the strife of party, the meekness of the gospel is banished, its charities stifled, and the most sacred appellations bestowed on wranglings which nurture malignant corruption, and scatter infernal pestilence. The infidel stands by, a spectator of these guilty scenes, and scoffingly remarks, that Christians “have just religion enough to make them hate one another heartily.” This departure from the *spirit* of the gospel, among those who retain its *doctrines*, is a common, and a **GRAND APOSTASY**. The Holy One of Israel cannot suffer it to pass with impunity ; and it is doubtless a principal cause of the controversy which he is now pleading with us, by restraining his gracious influence, and permitting the adversary to triumph.

In searching for the reasons of this difference, so little to our credit, between ourselves and the first believers, their attention, compared with our inattention, to the table of the Lord, is too remarkable to be overlooked. At this holy ordinance *they* were incessantly together. Between *our* communions is an interval of several months. When *they* rose from the sacramental bread, it was their joy, that in a few days they should mingle their friendship, and renew their vows, in the same spiritual covenant. With *us*, after one feast is

over, it is so long before another come, that we almost forget we are brethren. The monument of a Saviour's death, with us a rarity, being continually before their eyes, kept their faith steady; awakened the most tender emotions; and preached to their hearts the duty of mutual love. Could it be otherwise? If reiterated meditation fix the evanescent impression; if the object of warm attachment stir the soul; if society, in an exercise purified by grace, and elevated by devotion, beget reciprocal endearment; then must frequent communion have an auspicious influence on Christian charity. Love is inscribed on every object, every action, every circumstance, connected with it. No admittance here for diabolical tempers. A son of malice may thrust himself outwardly among the children, but he is no child; nor does he partake of the children's food. The bread of earth he may eat, and the wine of earth he may drink: but he has no communion in the body and blood of crucified Jesus. He is, therefore, out of the question. It relates to none but living disciples.

Now, is it possible that believers should indulge a sentiment of *pride*, when they are at once reminded that they were *lifted from the dunghill*, and receive the pledge of a celestial

crown? A sentiment of *revenge*, when they realize that God is in Christ *reconciling* them to himself? A sentiment of *enmity*, when he is saying to them, I am *pacified* towards thee **FOR ALL THAT THOU HAST DONE**; and thy sins and thine iniquities will I remember no more? When they feel themselves infinite debtors to the love of Jesus, can they disobey his commandment enforced by this argument from his own gracious lips, *as I have loved you, so do ye also love one another*? Let Christians declare from their own experience whether they have not often felt, on sacramental occasions, a more than usual interest and complacency in each other? Whether suspicion and coldness, contention and revilings, among brethren, ever appear to them more indecent and detestable; whether they are ever more ashamed of themselves and of others for the want of mutual love, than when they have risen with spiritual-mindedness from the table spread for the household of faith? Indeed, if it is a mean of exciting our love to the Lord Jesus, it must be a mean, and a powerful one too, of exciting love to one another; for in proportion as we love him, we will love his image, and be governed by his Spirit. And it is no less clear that this is one of the ends of its institution. For, being the memorial of our Redeemer's love

to us, it sets before us the amiable pattern of our love to each other. It is almost impossible to contemplate it in the former light, and not in the latter; and altogether so, to condemn it in the latter without profaning it in the former.

The result is, that spiritual communions having a natural and necessary effect in cherishing Christian love, their *frequency* must have a proportional effect in *augmenting* it. An appeal to facts will justify the inference. The whole weight of primitive example is in its favor. And at this hour, no churches, in point of harmony and love, exhibit so fair a copy of that example as those in which communions are most frequent and most simple.

Would you, then, dear brethren, contribute to banish the animosities which are but too prevalent in the family of faith, and to revive the love of former days, repair *often* to your sacramental table: there learn that “in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.” There pray with the apostle, and with him embody in your actions the spirit of the prayer, “AS MANY as walk according to THIS RULE, peace be on them, and mercy even upon the Israel of God.”

6. *It is by no means improbable, that the resto-*

ration of scriptural communions may usher in a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

It has just been shown, that no mean will more effectually conduce to the revival of love; and with the grace of love every other grace flourishes. In that sweet confidence and endearment which are inseparable from it, believers strengthen each other's faith; and are helpers of each other's joy; nor is there, in the whole circle of social graces and duties, any which the Lord more delighteth to honor.

Beside, the nearer a church approaches in her worship to the institutions of the Lord Jesus, the more solid ground has she to implore and to expect his countenance. Christians, the strength of whose judgment was exceeded only by the fervor of their piety, have complained that a damp hath settled on their spirits, and the liberty of God's children been remarkably denied them, on the sacramental fasts and thanksgivings. The only reason they could assign for the fact is, that they could not say they had God's warrant for them. Laying them aside, and retaining his appointments, faith can plead both his warrant and his promise. He hath sufficiently taught us, and often "by terrible things in righteousness," that he will not sanctify the liberties which men take with his worship. If they

throw it into a different from that which he hath prescribed, they have no right to look for his blessing. And if at any time they enjoy it notwithstanding, it is an act of mere sovereignty condescending to their infirmities. Historical testimony may be confirmed by our own observation, that the power of godliness declines in a church as the inventions of men prevail. And on the contrary, that in those churches which are freest from them, the life of religion, and the presence of the Lord with his ordinances, are most conspicuous. It demands, indeed, no small degree of spiritual-mindedness, and of reliance on his wisdom and truth, to be satisfied with them exactly as he has left them. They are so plain, so noiseless, so unlike every carnal notion of importance, that when compared with their destined effects, unsanctified reason stands astonished, and cries, how can it be? Yet Israel's King hath chosen to work in a manner, and by means, which shall mortify human pride, and exalt his name. It is the highest attainment of any Christian society to "receive, observe, and keep pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances as he hath appointed in his word;" humbly committing their success to himself, and steadily resisting the encroachment of human officiousness.

The fear that discarding all uncommanded observances, and bringing back our sacramental feast to the simplicity and frequency from which it has swerved, would destroy reverence and breed carelessness, proceeds from unbelief in his providence and promise. The protection of this blessed ordinance would then be placed where it ought to be, in the hands of its Author; and our attendance on it would be distinguished by greater power and glory, because it would have more of God and less of man. A church casting off her errors in a day of coldness, declension, and blasphemy—doing homage to truth by sacrificing her prejudices, her habits, her traditions—setting at defiance the scoff of the worldling, and the clamor of the formalist, in order to conform more perfectly to scriptural establishments, and honor more pointedly the love of Jesus, would be a spectacle not more singular than magnificent. It would bespeak the doing of the Lord; and would be a token, such as we have never had, that he is about to revive his work in the midst of the years, to build up our Zion, and appear to us in his glory. And in the hope thereof, when we see this, our heart shall rejoice, and our bones shall flourish as an herb.

Lastly. *The proposed reform will be a preparative for trial.*

With trials we may, at all events, lay our account. They even commonly precede a revival. The messenger of the covenant, when he comes into his temple, is, "like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap." And the less stubble to be consumed, the fewer stains to be washed out, the better, as the preliminary discipline will be gentler. And while he shakes the nations, should he also, as appearances indicate, sift the churches, *they* will suffer the least in whose skirts are the fewest abominations. Uncommanded observances will then be found to be a serious evil, and the zeal that defended them will be rewarded with stripes.

If we would be ready, O brethren, to meet our God, let us give all diligence that our public order, as well as our personal hope, be built upon the naked rock ; and in the day of the tempest both will stand fabrics fair and immovable, when the rubbish of human devices and of human flatteries are swept away, and made the sport of the whirlwind.

"Now may the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

CONSIDERATIONS ON LOTS.

CONSIDERATIONS ON LOTS.

NUMBER I.

The Nature of a Lot.

THE frequency of public lotteries, the enormous system of private frauds which has grown out of them, the extensive ramifications of their *principle* through the community, and the facility with which many well disposed persons are seduced into the support of that principle, seem to require an investigation of the true nature and use of the *lot*. We shall accordingly devote some papers to that subject.

A lot is an action, intended to decide a point without the aid of human skill or power. This definition includes every form of the lot, or every decision which in common language is said to be *left to chance*. Thus, whether the lot or the chance consist in drawing a ticket at random out of the lottery-wheel, after it has been turned round to prevent collusion, or in the position of a die which is thrown after rat-

tlung it in the box, or in the particular distribution of cards after a promiscuous shuffle, or in the tossing up of a piece of money, is a matter of no moment. The principle of the action is still the same; the decision to be effected is put avowedly out of the control of human skill and power.

My design is to show that every such action, that is, every lot, is a direct appeal to the living God, as the governor of the world, and that his holy providence is concerned in the event.

For, if it be not an appeal to God, what is it? Not a reference to the tribunal of men; for it is so constructed as purposely to exclude their jurisdiction. Not a reference to any other creatures superior to man; for it would suppose them to be omnipresent, which is an attribute of Deity. Not a reference to nothing; for that is a contradiction. Not a reference to chance; for that is atheism. There is, indeed, much talk of chance: and, in its popular use, signifying something which happens in a manner unforeseen by us, the term is harmless enough. But when used philosophically, that is, when applied to the doctrine of cause and effect, it is either absurd or blasphemous. For what is this chance? It either has a real existence or not. If it has no

existence, then when you say that a lot is determined by chance, you say that it is determined by nothing : that is, you say here is a sensible effect produced by no cause at all. This is pure nonsense. If your chance is a real being, what sort of being ? Either it has life, intelligence, and power, or not. If not, then you say that millions of effects (for there are millions of lots in the world) are produced by a cause which has neither power, nor intelligence, nor life : that is, you say, that millions of actions are performed by an agency which is essentially incapable of any action whatever. And this is as pure absurdity as the former. If you say that your chance is a living, intelligent, and active being, I ask who it is ? and how you got your knowledge of it ? You certainly imagine it to possess omnipresence and omnipotence ; for you suppose it capable of producing, at the same moment, millions of effects in millions of places ; and thus you have found out a being that displays perfections of God, and yet is not God. This conclusion is as blasphemous as the others are insane. There is no retreat. Survey the subject in any possible light, and you are driven to this issue, that the lot is, by the very nature of the case, a direct appeal to the living God, as the Governor of the world.

As the appeal is to him, so his providence regulates the event.

To many it seems irrational that the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity should descend to our little affairs, and take cognizance of things which minister to our amusement or agitate our passions. They can conceive of a providence which keeps worlds in their sphere and legislates for the universe. This general government fills them with magnificent ideas, worthy as they think of the Supreme ; but to such petty concerns as the common incidents of human life, they judge it beneath his majesty and felicity to attend !

This sort of argumentation is not the only instance in which atheism puts on the cloak of reverence for God. I do not assert that all who adopt such notions are atheists, but that the doctrine itself is atheistical there can be no doubt. It makes a distinction between a *general* and a *particular* providence, admitting the former and exploding the latter. We are to believe, then, that Jehovah rules the *whole* of his universe but not its *parts* ; or that he has fixed certain laws by which its operations go on independently of his interposition. A fine world of creatures truly, that can “live, and move, and have their being,” in a state of complete separation from the influence of their

Creator! According to this scheme, he has had no sort of interest in them from the moment he gave them out of his plastic hand, and never shall have any during the whole period of their being. And as for those who dream of his presiding over suns and stars, without noticing the puny inhabitants of our globe, they might with equal reason dream of his creating suns and stars without his having created men, or beasts, or insects, at all. That which it was not unworthy of him to create, it is not unworthy of him to preserve and govern. It would surely be inverting all propriety to maintain, that in proportion as creatures are feeble, they can dispense with his fostering care; and that rational creatures, formed for immortality, are exempted from the empire of his law. For however artfully the sophist may play off his quibbles, a sound mind will perceive that, without a particular providence, man cannot be accountable.

This doctrine of a providence extending even to the most trivial occurrences pervades the system of revelation, and is stated in the scriptures with the utmost precision and perspicuity. *I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil. I, JEHOVAH, do all these things.* (Is. xlv. 7.) *Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they (the young animals) are created;*

and thou renewest the face of the earth. (Ps. civ. 30.) *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered.* (Mat. x. 29, 30.) What can be of less importance than the perishing of a sparrow? What more worthless than a hair of one's head? And yet, the Truth itself being witness, both are objects of the divine regard. "It accords with the most liberal spirit of philosophy to believe, that not a stone can fall or plant rise without the immediate agency of divine power."* This is good sense, and Christianity owns it all. If, then, the providence of God directs and disposes all other, the most minute events, by what reasoning shall it be proved to have no concern with lots? especially as he has declared the lot to be under his immediate inspection? *The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.* (Prov. xvi. 33.) This will be decisive with him who in simplicity and reverence inquires after the truth. But as there are captious spirits which seek to hide themselves in the mist of objections, and as arguments addressed to the love of dissipation and of gain are apt to make "the worse appear the better reason," we shall pursue a little

* Malthus. Essay on the Principle of Population. Vol. II. p. 67.

farther the denial of such a providence as embraces the drawing of a ticket or the cast of a die.

To deny, then, that the divine providence is concerned in decisions obtained by lot, is to deny that it has any concern with individuals or their actions. For it cannot be shown that the government of God affects *any* individual or *any* action, but upon the broad principle of its extending to *every* individual and *every* action. If this position is incorrect, a line of distinction must be drawn between persons and actions that *are* and *are not* under his immediate control. If there are individuals to whom his providence, which is another name for the administration of his government, does not reach, then all such individuals are exempted from the obligation of his law, and are neither accountable nor dependent. For it is absurd to talk of dependence, and law, and responsibility, while you exclude the only agency which, by ascertaining facts, motives, and character, can lay the basis of a perfect judgment.

If, on the other hand, the divine providence embraces all *persons*, but not all *actions*, it follows that the actions thus omitted are not subject to the divine law; and, of course, that men are at one period of their lives amenable

to God for their conduct, and at another period are not amenable. And between these two states of being *with* and *without* law to God they are perpetually vibrating. But how are they to know when these alterations take place? God has not revealed it, and they cannot discover it for themselves. But no judicious man can be reconciled to so miserable a subterfuge from a pinching argument. It will not bear examination for a single moment. The alternative is, that the providence of God directs every thing or nothing. If the former, then even the casting of a die; if the latter, we are plunged into atheism at once; for a God who does not govern the world is no God at all.

Perhaps it will be urged, that the Creator has “fixed certain laws in the physical world; that the doctrine of chances, founded upon these laws, is a subject of calculation; and that their operation is the only thing to be seen in the combination of chances.”

I assent to the proposition, but contend that the objection grounded upon it is either futile or impious.

Futile—for it amounts to no more than this, that the Most High acts by *second* causes; unless, indeed, they can act *without* him. The

objection, to have any force, must mean that they *can* so act ; and then,

It is impious—for it strikes at the *whole government of God*, in so far as it is carried on through the medium of physical laws. To repeat the substance of a remark already made, if his providence has no concern in one, two, or twenty actions or events, occurring according to physical laws, it is equally unconcerned in *all* such events and actions ; and thus we arrive at the old inference, that God has nothing to do with us nor our affairs. This mode of reasoning, pushed a little farther, will expel every thing but physical laws out of the universe. If I may shut my Maker out of all events happening according to these laws, why not myself and every other rational agent ? And if I set my neighbor's house on fire, or cut his throat, why not refer these things to the class of facts happening according to the laws of muscular motion ? You shall not tell me that my rational and moral nature acted through the instrumentality of the firebrand or the knife ; because this is to assert what you have just denied, viz. that intelligent and moral power acts by physical means. On my principles I admit your solution, but then it spoils your philosophy : for I shall as soon believe that an axe can hew wood without the

agency of man, as that physical events can be produced, or physical law exist, without the agency of God. And I shall as soon deny the hewing of wood with an axe in my hand to be my own act, as deny the production of an event by physical laws to be an act of the divine providence. In truth, all moral order is maintained, and all moral events come to pass, by the intervention of physical law. And thus the conclusion forces itself upon us, that the disposing of the lot is as much the act of God, as if he were to perform it by some visible interposition. And therefore a wanton or needless appeal to him by the lot is a *profanation of his name*.

It will not avail to plead, "the unseemliness of supposing that men of profane minds can, whenever they please, *compel* the Almighty to become umpire between them." The same objection applies to the *oath*. Shall men of profane minds compel the Almighty at their pleasure to ascend his throne of judgment, and decide on perjuries and blasphemies? Such language is irreverent and ought not to be uttered. The plea, however, may be resorted. Shall the laws of God's world be suspended, or his ordinary agency interrupted, because men choose to be wicked? Shall they oblige him to work miracles in order to

keep himself out of the way so often as they incline to sport with his providence? Nay, his appointments stand. His laws go on. His agency in them ceases not for a moment. And if men convert them to an unholy use, he will not alter his course to prevent either their crime or their punishment.

To exhibit this matter in another light. If the divine providence is not to be considered in the lot, why is it to be considered in any other action? And if in no other, upon what principle can there be any religious worship? Why should men pray? Is the Most High to leave them in their pastimes and sins, and come at their beck in the hour of trouble? How can there be any future retribution? For this proceeds upon the supposition of God's perpetual presence and agency; as there is none in earth or heaven, but himself, who can render to every one according to his works.

The sum is, that against the interposition of God's providence in the decision by lot, there can be advanced no arguments which do not lead directly to atheism. Consequently, all such arguments are false; and a decision by the lot is a decision of God's own providence. And as the lot, in every form and under all circumstances, is an appeal to him, it ought to be employed in a manner suitable to its nature.

What the proper use of the lot is, and how it is abused at the expense of much sin, shall be pointed out hereafter.

NUMBER II.

Its Scriptural Use.

It has already been proved from the very nature of the thing, that a lot is, in every form and upon every occasion, an appeal to the Most High God as the Governor of the world, and that the decision obtained by it is to be regarded as his decision. My doctrine, however, comes clothed with an authority much higher than that of argument, the authority of his own oracles. *The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.* (Prov. xvi. 33.) This *whole disposing*, a good translation from a term of great latitude, cannot comprehend less than the following declarations :

1. That as soon as the lot leaves the hands of men, it passes into the hand of God.
2. That the direction of it to its issue is his own act ; and,

3. That he acknowledges the result as a judgment given by himself.

Can there remain any doubt on this point with a serious mind? Is there any suspicion that the reasoning upon it may have been overstrained, or the sense of the passage just quoted mistaken? Let us compare them with scriptural facts.

The patriarch Jacob, on his dying bed, foretold by the spirit of prophecy the future condition of his sons, and even marked out the districts which some of them should inhabit. Moses, in his parting blessing, was equally particular with respect to certain of the tribes. And yet the land of their inheritance, by a statute of Moses himself, was directed to be *divided by lot*: and was actually so divided under the inspection of Joshua, Eleazer, and the principal men of the nation. Thus, also, in the election of the first king of Israel, Saul, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, was pointed out to Samuel the prophet by special revelation, as the man whom God had designated for that high station. For *The Lord had told Samuel in his ear, saying, To-morrow, about this time, I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel. And when Samuel, the next day, saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man*

whom I spake to thee of ! This same shall reign over my people. In pursuance of this intimation Samuel took Saul apart, and poured a phial of oil upon his head, and kissed him, and said, *Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance ?*

This affair, the reader will notice, was between Samuel and the new monarch alone, as the former had, of set purpose, excluded all witnesses. It appears also to have been kept a profound secret. For when God had given to Saul “another heart,” and the prophetic spirit had fallen upon him, the people were astonished, and said one to another, *What is this that is come unto the son of Kish ?* But had they known the nature of the interview between him and Samuel, they would have been prepared for this singular, and to them inexplicable occurrence.

Shortly after these transactions, the good old prophet assembled the tribes of Israel, before God, in Mizpeh ; and when he had, in the most dignified manner, but without success, remonstrated against their folly and their sin in rejecting their God, and desiring a king, he ordered them to present themselves by their tribes, and to choose their king by *lot*. The tribes came near ; the lot was cast ; and

fell first on the tribe, next on the family, and finally on the person, of Saul.

Other instances are at hand, but these two are sufficient. The certainty of the event is previously ascertained in both, by the testimony of God ; and yet the lot is cast in the same manner as if nothing had been revealed ! Who does not see, that the credit of his prophets and the truth of their inspiration, were put, by such a proceeding, to the most hazardous of all possible experiments. Who does not see, in the exact coincidence of the sortilege with the prediction, a divine finger directing the lot to that same issue which a divine prescience had foretold ? The alternative is plain. You must either deny the scriptural narrative to be true, or you must concede that the “ whole disposing of these lots was from the Lord.” Samuel exclaimed, when Saul was produced to the people, *See ye him, whom the Lord hath chosen ?* They knew of no choice but that of the *lot*. They never so much as hesitated whether it was the divine act or not. Nor was their opinion at all uncommon. The very same opinion runs through the whole history of lots as recorded in the Bible. And, by the way, it is not impertinent to ask, How such a notion took possession of the minds of men ? To say that

superstition early prevailed, and that it easily corrupts the moral and intellectual powers, may satisfy an infidel, but not an inquirer, far less a thinker. Superstition obscures, abuses, and degrades, whatever it touches, but it creates nothing. It misapplies, and throws into a thousand absurd contortions, the religious character of man ; but without the pre-existence of that character it can have no materials to act upon. The lot could never have been an engine of superstition ; I will add, could never have found its way into sober discussion, and thence into foolish pastime, but in consequence of deep-laid conviction that it is a mode of manifesting the divine will. Ring the changes upon the word superstition as often and as loud as you please ; you do but beg the question ; you give no explanation ; you are not a hair's breadth nearer the solution of the problem. Besides, in the cases which we have examined, there was no room for superstition. It is not the attribute of that blind and senseless tyranny to look into the secrets of a future age ; and the coincidences between the prophecy and the lot, both in the division of Canaan and the elevation of Saul, were too many, too minute, and too public, to have been either fortuitous or fraudulent. What remains, but that the conviction of

which we are speaking could have had no other origin than a faith in the particular providence of God, commingling with affairs apparently the most casual, overruling them to a proper termination, and instamping the lesson upon the use of the lot? This beautifully elucidates certain scriptural phraseologies which otherwise are hardly intelligible. *Thou sustainest MY LOT. Thou shalt stand in THY LOT. The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the LOT of the righteousness. INHERITANCE (LOT) among them that are sanctified. Giving thanks unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the INHERITANCE (LOT) of the saints in light. Neither as being lords over God's HERITAGE (LOTS).*

How could men ever have submitted their wishes, their reason, their fortunes, their lives, to the lot, without a strong assurance that the wise and righteous God speaks by it? How could the term "lot" have been adopted to signify their condition and circumstances, as ordered by his providence, without a settled belief that the lot is regulated by his providence? Or, if this belief is erroneous, how could it have been admitted into the *devotional language* of his church, and sanctioned, from time immemorial, by his Spirit of truth?

These considerations preclude, in a great

measure, an objection which readily offers itself, and is not without force. "That the lots mentioned in scripture were extraordinary, and became appeals to God, and expressed his will, in virtue of his own commandment, which is equally necessary to every similar application of them; and therefore, that the instances quoted do neither prove his particular agency in ordinary lots, nor furnish any general principle of reasoning as to their nature and use."

This objection, though deemed by some to be unanswerable, is not valid.

1. It is incorrect in its *facts*. For although there are instances of God's directing an appeal to him by lot for special purposes; yet there are others in which the appeal was not founded upon any such direction; and so must have rested upon the known design of the lot.

2. It is incorrect in its assumption, viz. that it was the special injunction of God which converted the lot into an appeal to him. Whereas the injunction *presupposes* such an appeal as being essential to the lot; and in appointing it to be employed on special occasions, only appointed the use of a *known method of bringing a matter before the divine tribunal*, in preference

to other methods which might have been selected.

3. The objection throws its authors and advocates into that gulf of atheism, to which, it was demonstrated in our first paper, the denial of God's providence in the lot most certainly tends.

From the whole of the foregoing view we collect, that the lot is an act of high and solemn worship, as an appeal to the God of the earth and of the heavens must necessarily be; and that it ought never to be interposed but in matters which warrant such an appeal.

What then are the uses of the lot? When is it proper? And how should it be conducted?

The *uses* of the lot are two.

1. It bears witness to a *particular providence*.

It does not merely acknowledge God as an upright judge who will, at such time as shall please him, reward the good and punish the evil; but it incorporates with an act of worship, a profession of faith that he is present, and pronounces judgment *on the spot*. It is *his* finger which moves the lot, and *his* voice which utters the decree! The operation, then, of the lot, is to check, by a *visible* rebuke, that forgetfulness of God to which we are so prone, and which produces, in all their variety, the

bitter fruits of iniquity and of woe—to assert his dominion not only over every world, but over every creature, and over all the circumstances which relate to that creature's happiness or misery—to erect a barrier against the inroads of both speculative and practical atheism—and to strengthen the influence of that pure and undefiled religion which is built upon the doctrine of a particular providence.

2. The lot is of use to determine questions among men.

Like the oath, it is a last resort. The one appeals to God for the sincerity of our declarations: the other for the direction of our choice. They are different forms of acknowledging his government, but the effect of both is the same—to put an end to controversy, by putting a limit to human research. Thus the scripture represents them—

“ *An OATH,*

For conformation, is
an end of all strife.”

Heb. vi. 16.

“ *The LOT,*

Causeth contentions
to cease, and parteth
between the mighty.”

Prov. xviii. 18.

The parallel is exact, and leads to the second question,

When is the lot *proper* ?

In cases of importance ; which cannot be decided by other means in the exercise of our reason ; and for the prevention or termination of strife.

The case must be *important* ; for appeals to the living God with thoughtless frequency, upon mere trifles, is an impiety which cannot be indulged with impunity, nor thought of without horror.

The case must not only be difficult, but such as our *best discretion is unable to bring to a comfortable issue*.

For if we appeal directly to the judgment of God in things which may be fairly and wisely settled without so appealing, we depreciate the value, by superseding the exercise of our rational faculties—we endeavor to disturb the order which God has established, subjecting the tribunal of human reason to the tribunal of his supremacy ; inasmuch as we attempt to abolish the inferior tribunal by withdrawing causes which are of its proper jurisdiction ; and thus, impeaching his wisdom, not honoring his throne, we provoke him rather to inflict his curse than to command his blessing.

Cases in which the lot may lawfully be used, are such as these :

The division of property : when the portions

of it are adjusted with impartiality and skill ; and yet the claimants cannot agree upon the distribution. The appointment of men to a service of a peculiar interest or hazard ; when more than the requisite number appear ; and their respective qualifications or disqualifications are pretty equally balanced.

The selection of victims ; when several, involved in the same crime, are under the same condemnation : but the government, leaning to mercy, and resolving to make an example, requires only a part to suffer, and does not name the individuals. The reader can easily add other illustrations.

I have only to answer the third question upon this head ; viz.

How should the lot *be conducted* ?

As it is an act of worship, the glorious majesty of Him with whom they have to do, should be present to the minds of the worshippers. Passion, levity, indifference, should be laid aside. The name of God should be invoked by prayer ; and the lot cast as under his eye. When the issue is declared, the parties concerned should repress every feeling of resentment or dissatisfaction ; and acquiesce with promptitude and reverence, as they undoubtedly would have done, had their Al-

mighty Umpire rendered himself visible, and given sentence in their hearing.

There cannot be a happier elucidation of the right manner of applying the lot than the example of the Apostles at the election of a colleague to fill the place of Judas. They knew that an Apostle could be chosen only by the immediate act of their Master in heaven. They knew, however, that he must have certain qualifications which Peter mentioned. They looked round among their brethren, and found *two* thus qualified. They had gone as far as they could go in fixing upon the man by ascertained rules, and an insuperable difficulty presenting itself in the circumstance of *two* answering the general description, while only *one* was wanted, they refer the decision to their ascended Lord. Having set the candidates before him, *they prayed and said, Thou, Lord, (it was the Lord Jesus to whom they prayed), Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias : and he was numbered with the eleven Apostles.* The decision was received with profound submission, as the decision of the Lord Jesus himself. Not

a soul disputed it ; not a whisper was heard of discontent or doubt. Let Christians, in their use of the lot, go and do likewise.

NUMBER III.

Its Abuses.

IN the preceding numbers we have established to the satisfaction, we hope, of the serious reader, these two propositions:

1. That the *lot* is a direct appeal to God as the Governor of the world, founded on the faith of a particular providence.

2. That when used on proper occasions, and in a proper manner, both of which have been explained, it is an act of high and acceptable worship.

From this doctrine the conclusion is plain, that all unnecessary, light, careless, or customary uses of the lot ; all uses of it, other than such as are holy, reverent, and warranted by the rules of the written word, are sinful, and to be avoided as profanations of the divine name.

For under the *name of God* is comprehended every thing by which *he makes himself known*.

In the oath he is solemnly invoked as the Omniscient, whose “eyes are upon the truth.” In the lot a decision is put into his hands as the Sovereign Umpire between his creatures, who dispenses to them the most pure and perfect righteousness. In both, his dominion over us, his right to dispose of us and our affairs, and the account which we shall render to him, are fully acknowledged.

The sinfulness of profane swearing consists in treating with levity that NAME of God which the spirits of heaven adore; in impairing our sense of his majesty; in weakening the restraint which his authority imposes on the lusts of men; and diffusing, in the same proportion, the influence of practical atheism. If, then, as has been proved, the lot is an ordinance of the same general nature with the oath; if it involves the same homage to the divine government; if it is calculated to promote the same great moral and social purposes, who can doubt that the irreligious use of it is of the same complexion with the irreligious use of the oath, and like it belongs to that “taking of the name of the Lord in vain,” which “the Lord will not hold guiltless?” We question not that many who would on no

account pollute their lips with a profane oath, are in the habit of misapplying the lot without any conscientious scruple whatever. The reason is to be sought in their want of instruction and reflection. That they sin is not less certain than that the lot is an appeal to God. Their sin, we hope, must be referred to ignorance ; but that ignorance cannot be invincible ; and is, therefore, culpable ; and the excuse arising from it grows less valid with every opportunity of information, and with every call to “ consider their ways.”

This deduction from the foregoing reasoning we might submit without comment to the *conscience* of our readers. It contains the substance of those conclusions by which, on many accounts public and private, we wish them to try the use of the lot as it occurs in the present state of society. But as a general truth is often best perceived in its details, we shall exemplify our principle by pointing out several *abuses* of the lot.

1. It is often employed as a means of determining the spiritual state and character of individuals. This is done in three ways.

Cards, with texts of scripture on one side, the other being blank, are shuffled together, and then dealt out to the company, who read the text on their own cards, under an impres-

sion of its being a *divine message* to them respectively. To what lengths this species of *game* is carried, or under what restrictions it is conducted, we pretend not to know ; but that such a game exists we are perfectly certain.

In place of these cards the leaves of the Bible are sometimes substituted ; the book being kept shut, a *pin is stuck between the leaves*, and a message from God is looked for in one of the pages between which the pin is inserted.

Nearly allied to this, and substantially the same is the practice of *opening the Bible at random*, and taking the passage first caught by the eye as the message intended.

These methods of applying the word of God carry with them the mark of such puerile and absurd superstition, that it may seem needless even to mention them. But the mind in distress about eternal things, under the influence of erroneous views of religion, is often bewildered, and impelled by temptation to expedients very ill calculated to yield relief. However incredible it may be thought, this very practice of *turning the Bible into a lottery* has filled some weak yet well meaning people with unfounded confidence, and driven others almost to desperation. One man finds on his card, or selects with his pin, or catches by a

sudden glance of his eye, an assurance of grace, or a promise of eternal life, and he is transported with ecstasy. Another by the same means lights upon a threatening or a curse, and he is broken with terrors as if an angel of God had written before his eyes a sentence of reprobation. That which has happened already may happen again, and Christians should be on their guard against such delusion. Delusion it undoubtedly is, if words of truth and soberness are entitled to our regard.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.” But in order to reap this excellent fruit from the holy writings, they must be studied, searched, compared. They are addressed to us as rational beings, whose faculties are to be exercised in discovering their sense, that we may understand what is the revealed will of God, and what opinion we are to form of our own character. Serious inquiry into these matters, with an ardent desire for the guidance of the Spirit of truth, will, for the most part, enable us to determine with tolerable precision every question affecting our substan-

tial interests. They who are the most devoted to it are not only the most intelligent Christians, but, ordinarily, enjoy the most settled peace, and are most abundant in the “fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory God.” But now all this use of the scriptures, and all the blessed effects accruing from diligent and holy investigation of them, are completely set aside by converting them into a lottery. The greatest and the least acquaintance with them are exactly on a level. Progress in the knowledge of their doctrines, precepts, promises, is of no avail. All comparing of things spiritual with spiritual is at an end. There is no more room for self-examination. The trial of tempers, affections, habits, principles, corruptions, graces, declensions, revivals, by the word of God, is superseded. The Bible ceases to be a rule of faith and conduct, for every judgment is made to rest upon an *immediate revelation obtained by lot*. They who resort to such a summary method of getting at spiritual results ought in all consistency to pursue it in temporal things. It would prevent the trouble of much circuitous industry; it would engender no sloth more ignoble than what it creates in the concerns of the soul; and it is obviously as proper to decide by the turn of

a shilling whether we shall plough or not, as to interrogate the point of a pin whether we shall be saved or perish.

It is surprising that they, who are addicted to this unhallowed use of the scriptures, do not perceive their self-contradiction ; and what is infinitely worse, their endeavor to draw into self-contradiction the God with whom they have to do. They either lay some stress on the issue of their lottery speculations in the scripture, or none. If none, the contradiction lies in their attempting to produce *something* by means which, according to their own concession, can produce *nothing*. If, on the other hand, any stress be laid on them, the contradiction lies in attempting to make these very means destroy their own result, which is always done by *repeating* the experiment. And when the issues differ, as in most cases they will, one conclusion is set off against the other, and yet *both* are valid. Thus, if a man shall draw a blessing this moment, and a curse the next, he is bound to believe himself both blessed and accursed ; for the reason of his believing the one is equally strong for believing the other, or else for not believing either, which would be as gross a contradiction as the former.

If this, however, were all ; if in these their

liberties with the Bible men of vain, irregular minds, merely displayed their own folly, they might expose themselves at their leisure. But they actually endeavor to draw the Most High God into self-contradiction. For if they view those passages of his word which are assigned to them by lot, as expressing *his* decision, they ought never to *try again*, because *his* “counsel shall stand.” Whereas, by the very fact of “trying again,” they ask him to reverse his own judgment. And thus, *their characters remaining the same*, should they happen, as in the example above, to get now a curse and then a blessing, they ascribe to him two opposite judgments, in one of which he must necessarily certify a falsehood. These are daring freedoms indeed. The very thought of perverting his book of life into a book of gambling should fill us with horror.

But let not our reprehension of such profaneness, for by no softer name can we call it, be misunderstood. Let us not be suspected of denying that portions of divine truth, suddenly and unexpectedly presented to the mind, have in many instances been accompanied with extraordinary effects. A careless man has unintentionally opened the Bible at a place which arrested his notice and flashed light in upon his conscience. It was an arrow from the

quiver of the Eternal, shot into his very heart, and it stuck there, drinking up his spirit, till it was extracted by the healing hand of mercy.

So, likewise, many of those who “fear the Lord,” and yet “walk in darkness and have no light,” proceeding in the path of duty, mourning and depressed, have taken up their Bible, hardly knowing whether they should read it or not; and have been directed to some unlooked-for passage, which, being powerfully applied to their hearts, has dispelled their fears, and filled them with “peace and joy in believing.” We know that all this is exploded by many, and even by some who are called, and who ought to be, ministers of the gospel, as blind fanaticism. If the reader be of that class, we have at present no dispute with him. He is welcome to the consolation of laughing at that which multitudes of believers, now in the church, and multitudes more among the “spirits of just men made perfect,” can attest to be a divine reality. He has much higher reason to doubt his own Christianity than the sobriety of their experience.

But while we allow in the amplest manner for such cases as these—while we are far from “limiting the Holy One of Israel”—we cannot

forget that his sovereignty is not our rule of action, nor concede that his interposition in such instances as we have mentioned affords the smallest countenance to the practice we have condemned. “To the law and to the testimony ; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” But the sentence of “the law and the testimony” is not to be procured by cutting it up into lottery tickets, nor to be used as if the promises of life and the denunciations of death were pasted among it leaves, to be distributed by lot. As well might the divine promises and threatenings be parceled out on a backgammon board, and the *dice* be rattled for a *chance* of heaven or of hell. If every man, whose soul is not lost to seriousness, shudders at this idea, let him also shudder at the other, which is equally profane. It is a gross abuse of the lot, and therefore a prostitution of an ordinance by the proper use of which the name of God is glorified.

NUMBER IV.

Its Abuses—Continued.

WE exposed, in our last number, that signal abuse of the lot which employs it as a means of determining the spiritual state and character of individuals. We proceed to point out another abuse far more extensive in its operation and most fatal in its effects, we mean *games of chance*. Under this general appellation we comprehend *cards, dice*, and other games, of which the *lot* is an essential part.

The universal and decisive objection to them in every form and under all circumstances is, that they are *profane appeals to the divine throne, and a wanton prostitution of a divine ordinance*. For the premises which support this conclusion we refer the reader to our first two numbers.

We are aware that our position will not readily obtain the concurrence of many who are far from being friendly to gaming or gamblers. Both are held in abhorrence by sober-minded men throughout the whole world. But their opinions greatly vary as to the nature of the games.

Some consider them, or at least certain forms of them, as innocent and pleasant recreations, when they are not subservient to the sordid passions ; that is, when the parties either do not play for money, or for no more than is necessary, to keep up the spirit of the competition.

Others despise them as frivolous and ignoble pastimes, without attaching to them the blame of direct immorality, unless they become incentives to crime by becoming the sources of unlawful gain.

Many beyond doubt there are, whose indulgence in these sports carries them to no such excess ; who treat gaming and gamesters with merited contempt ; and who, while they give a leisure hour to the card-table or the die, have not the smallest suspicion that their amusement has an irreligious taint, or tends to weaken in the slightest degree the sense and effect of those obligations by which man is bound to God his Maker.

With these we remonstrate : with all who are not strangers to compunctious feeling after they have risen from a game of hazard ; and with all, who, although they have occasionally speculated upon the question, have never been at the pains to decide it satisfactorily to their own minds.

Gaming has always had an evil reputation in all civilized countries, especially such as have been enlightened by the Christian revelation. It is both curious and instructive to mark the gradations of this sentiment.

Gamesters themselves, in whom the avaricious lust has not quite overpowered both integrity and shame, know and feel that their occupation is vile ; for they study secrecy, not merely to elude the penal statutes of the law, but also to save appearances among men better than themselves. Fame, low as is her credit for veracity, has put less truth into her tattle, than is usual even with her, if there are not in this very city of New York, *gentlemen*, and *ladies* too, who consume their midnights over the fascinating chance, amid piles of money ; but who could never meet, in broad day, the infamy which confronts an avowed gambler.

This, it may be said, is referable to that wholesome discipline by which public opinion coerces the impudence of vice. For the most part it is so. But public opinion in an effect, and like all other effects must have a cause. Set the gamblers aside, and there remains a large body of sober, discreet members of the community who never gamble, who view gaming for money as altogether unjustifiable, as a

system of rapacity and plunder, and would on no account whatever so far degrade themselves in their own eyes as to pollute their hands with the product of the gaming board. Yet a game of chance, detached from such applications of it, they will not stigmatize as immoral. How did they arrive at the distinction? How will they show that a thing lawful for the purposes of amusement may not be lawful for the purposes of emolument also? Why should that be ill-gotten which is not gotten by ill-means? Why should an hour or two spent at the card-table *gratis* be consistent with virtue, and that same time spent in the same employment be condemned as criminal the moment it profits one's purse? Making money is not vicious; by the terms of the argument cards and dice are not vicious; and yet making money by cards or dice is accounted vicious by such a strong and general coincidence of opinion as imposes law upon society. What is there, then, to render the *combination* immoral? It cannot be mere excess of ardor in the pursuit of lucre. Labor may be excessive; enterprise may be excessive; economy may be excessive; yet economy, enterprise, and labor, are not immoral methods of acquiring property. If the dreadful *consequences*, which in all ages have followed the spirit of gaming,

be assigned as the reason, we ask why these dreadful consequences *have* followed? In the government of God evil consequences are the punishment of evil deeds. The loss, dishonor, and wretchedness, which sooner or later overtake the wicked, are the *natural* penalties by which he chastises sin, vindicates the goodness of his law, and proclaims his determination to enforce its authority. The universe cannot produce an example of a train of miseries associated, in every age, in every country, in every state of society, with any action or set of actions, in which there is no abuse of some divine institution. Thus, falsehood, debauchery, covetousness, dishonesty, revenge, and a thousand other vices, will all be found, upon close examination, to be abuses of God's institutions, and their deplorable effects to be the punishments which he has annexed to them respectively.

Now, as the fact is incontestible, that no curses are more conspicuous or regular than those which come down upon the head of the gambler, the inference is irrefragable that gaming must be a most provoking abuse of some divine institution. What is it? We answer, the *lot*. This solution alone goes to the bottom of the difficulty. This alone explains the moral phenomena which invariably

attend the system of gaming. An ordinance which God has appointed for the holy and reverend acknowledgment of his superintendence over the affairs of men, has been perverted to the ends, first of amusement, and then of lucre. This perversion he resents and punishes. It will be a pitiful evasion to plead instances of persons who play with moderation as invalidating our general argument. There are degrees of transgression and of correction. "Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; but it is not till "sin is '*finished*' that it '*bringeth forth death.*'" And the death which smites the perfected sin is only smiting the progeny of the parturient lust. The game of chance and downright gambling are but different stages of the same iniquity. They have always been coexistent; if not in the same individual, yet certainly in the same community. Let the former take its course, and the latter inevitably follows. So, when the spirit of gambling, which is the matured offspring of the game of chance, suffers the pains of divine displeasure, the blow is aimed at both together. It is the *principle* which the "Governor among the nations" is judging. If he strike it chiefly in its most depraved state and most offensive form, he does not indicate that in its earlier states and less ruinous connection he

tolerates it as innocent, but gives another document that he *is long suffering and slow to anger*. If this conclusion be at any time reversed, it is only a new fact in the history of an old imposture. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed SPEEDILY, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

All this, we are sensible, will be laughed to scorn by those who “like not to retain God in their knowledge.” We leave them to their propensities and their reward. *Judgments are prepared for SCORNERS, and stripes for the back of FOOLS.*

But to those who have never weighed the subject seriously, or who are “halting between two opinions,” as to the lawfulness or unlawfulness of the games in question, we address ourselves with better hope. They will not condemn, as unworthy of their regard, the reasonings which have already been submitted to them. They will hardly suppose that moralists, divines, and statesmen—Jews, Greeks, and Romans—political legislatures, and ecclesiastical councils—public principle, and private virtue, would all unite in reprobating an *innocent* amusement. But they have united in reprobating games of chance. A combination which seems impossible unless upon the

ground of some common and strong conviction of their intrinsic immorality.

That the gospel of Jesus Christ has divinely illuminated the doctrine of morals, nothing but a profligate warfare against truth will deny. Where that gospel reigns in its purest influence; rectifying speculative and practical error; setting the heart at liberty from the bondage of depravity; and imparting a quick sensibility to the conscience, games of chance are always held in the *worst* repute.

So long as a man continues profane and wicked, he can generally game himself, and make companions of those who do. But when "he turns from his vanities to serve the living God;" when he ceases to have "fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness;" when his delights are with the saints, with the excellent of the earth; and, in the hope of seeing Jesus as he is, he "purifies himself, even as *he* is pure," he cannot easily fail to throw away his cards and his dice. There have been, and there are, professors of religion who retain a predilection for these amusements; but they are not, and never have been, noted for circumspect and exemplary Christians. Go the whole round of those numerous circles which encompass the card-table. You will find selections of all sorts, from low vulgarity up to

accomplished fashion—from the refuse of the grog-shop, up to the most brilliant assemblage of the drawing-room; but if you fall in with a single card-party, composed of those who “worship God in spirit and in truth;” who remember that they were “redeemed from their VAIN CONVERSATION, with the precious blood of Christ;” and who are constrained by his love, to “live, not unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again;”—if you fall in with a single card-party composed of *such* Christians (and they are the only ones who shall see God,) we will give up the cause.

What shall we say to these things? Shall we say that a point which appears so serious to the very best of the human race, is not worth our attention? Shall we say that in deciding on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of a particular set of actions, we will prefer the judgment of the thoughtless, the profane, the abandoned, to the judgment of them who “fear God and keep his commandments?” Shall we say that his church, in which his presence dwells, and his mercies are dispensed, is a worse guide in morals, than the “world which lieth in wickedness?” Shall we say that the Spirit and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ teach his people to cherish an

unconquerable antipathy against practices which are not forbidden by his law ? Who, that has not parted with reverence for whatever is most holy, and just, and good, will embrace the affirmative ? And who, that vindicates the game of chance, does not embrace it ?

The reader perceives that the immorality which we attribute to games of hazard, does not arise from *circumstances* ; but is *essential* to their nature. We pronounce them immoral and unlawful, precisely on the ground of their *abuse and profanation of the lot*, which is an institution of God for special religious and moral purposes. We have introduced a view of their *effects* no further than was necessary for the prosecution of this argument. Not that we think these effects of trifling moment. They are of great and terrible moment. They should never be forgotten by any who incline to more indulgence than severity toward the games. By the light of the penalty, men often learn to read the law. An ear deaf to the voice of religion, may sometimes listen to the admonitions of prudence. An eye which sees no vice, may discern meanness ; and the fear of disgrace or loss may control those who are intractable by piety.

For the sake of such, and for the confirma-

tion of those who already obey the dictates of a well-informed conscience, we shall give in our next, a sketch of some evils *incident* to games of chance.

NUMBER V.

Evils Incident to Games of Chance.

WE have repeatedly stated, in the course of these papers, that our great objection to lots as they are commonly used, is the impiety of their principle; and that this constitutes the unlawfulness of games of chance, such as *cards, dice, &c.*

Assuming our doctrine as true, because it has been proved, we can view the mischiefs attendant upon gaming, in no other light than that of penalties which God inflicts upon the violation of his law. On the confirmed gamester we do not hope to make an impression. An understanding so blighted: a conscience so seared; a heart so cold, so selfish, and so hard, as enter into the composition of his character, render him deaf to remonstrance, and

put him, for the most part, out of the reach of reform.

But they who hate gaming, while they love the game ; who play freely for amusement, while they would, on no account, play for lucre ; and who would shudder at the thought of promoting either vice or misery, are intreated to reflect whether there be not such evils connected with the game of chance, even in its least exceptionable form, and with its best limitations, as require them to abstain from it altogether.

1. A most unprofitable consumption of *time*, is, by general consent, among the fruits of the card-table and the dice-board.

Those relaxations and exercises which are necessary to health, to spirits, and to activity, ordinarily carry with them their own restriction. Bodily weariness, or the cessation of that charm which, for a short period, the mind perceives in occupations calculated to relieve it from its pressure, are of themselves, an admonition that the end is answered ; that the recreation is over ; and that we must return to the business of life. But there is, in the very nature of the game of chance, a perpetual and increasing incitement. It tempts, fascinates, absorbs. The glass runs out unheeded : hour is added to hour ; and the party rises fatigued

and exhausted. Exceptions there doubtless are ; but that such is the *tendency* of the game, and such its very frequent effect, cannot well be denied. Let the reader pause. Let him ask himself whether this is an appropriation of time fit for one who means either to obey God, or to do good to man ? Let him ask, whether whole afternoons or evenings, thus expended, belong to the “redeeming of time ;” or will afford a peaceful retrospect on the bed of death ? Add up the moments which are squandered at the card-table, without the least imaginable benefit to body, to soul, or to society : look at their sum : see how much thou mightest have lived in them to thyself, to thy friends, to God ; and remember that it is all lost, worse than lost, from those days, for every one of which thou must give an account.

2. An inseparable concomitant of the card-table is *intellectual dissipation*.

The writer of these remarks numbers it among the mercies of God, that he has seldom, very seldom indeed, been placed in circumstances which compelled him to witness the operation of cards or dice on the minds of those engaged. He has seen enough, however, to satisfy him perfectly of their baneful influence. Can anything be more debasing

or contemptible, than that men and women, qualified to bear a respectable part in conversation, and even to adorn the social circle, should descend from the elevation of their own good sense to the level of every stupid thing, male and female, that can giggle or swear over a pack of cards ! Religion out of the question, this is no scene for understanding. Leave it to the coxcomb and the coquet, to the sharper and the fool ; but let not a man or woman of cultivated mind be dishonored by *taking a hand*. The very atmosphere which surrounds them is poison, at once to the intellect and the heart. It were much to be wished, that some who have imperceptibly learned to degrade their lips with the jargon of the gamester, could occasionally get such a reproof as the celebrated *Locke* administered to certain British noblemen. “ One day, three or four of these lords having met at Lord Ashley’s, when Mr. Locke was there ; after some compliments, cards were brought in before scarce any conversation had passed between them. Mr. Locke looked upon them for some time, while they were at play ; and, taking his pocket-book, began to write with great attention. One of the lords observing him, asked him what he was writing ? ‘ My lord,’ says he ‘ I am endeavoring to profit, as

far as I am able, in your company : for having waited with impatience for the honor of being in an assembly of the greatest geniuses of this age, and at last having obtained the good fortune, I thought I could not do better than write down your conversation ; and indeed, I have set down the substance of what has been said for this hour or two.’ Mr. Locke had no occasion to read much of this conversation : those noble persons saw the ridicule of it ; and diverted themselves with improving the jest. They quitted their play, and entering into rational discourse, spent the rest of their time in a manner more suitable to their character.”* If a similar record were made of the conversation of our card-parties, and published to the world, the ridicule would be intolerable : and if it should not deter men and women of sense from play forever afterwards, it would at least show how perfectly, for the sake of this paltry pastime, they confound themselves with the most arrant fools in nature.

“ When blockheads,” says a writer who will not be accused of bigotry, “ when blockheads rattle the dice-box, when fellows of vulgar and base minds sit up whole nights contemplating the turn of a card, their stupid occu-

* Life of Mr. Locke, prefixed to his works, p. 22, 8vo.

pation is in character ; but whenever a cultivated understanding stoops to the tyranny of so vile a passion, the friend to mankind sees the injury to society with that sort of aggravation as would attend the taking of his purse on the highway, if upon the seizure of the felon he was unexpectedly to discover the person of a judge.”*

3. Play for amusement leads to and perpetuates the *whole system of gaming for money*.

Very few, if any, learn to play with the design of becoming gamblers. But the progress to this issue is both natural and common. Knowledge of the cards is only a polite accomplishment, and an occasional hand no more than mere civility. What was acquiescence in the first stage becomes choice in the second, and passion in the third. A cent, a sixpence, or a quarter dollar, merely to keep up the spirit of the game, is all that many plead for or allow. The *sum* is indeed too trifling to be an objection, but are they aware of the *principle*? Do not the languor of the game without and its animation with the aid of this pecuniary stimulus, very strongly mark its *tendency*? Is not here the commencement of a course which carries the adventurer along with accelerated step to deep and fatal stakes?

* The Observer, by Richard Cumberland, No. 22.

Let it not be said that the sober circles, which are the object of these strictures, never permit and would be among the first to resist such extremes. They put, it seems, a rolling body on the top of a declivity, set it a going, and stop it before it reaches the bottom! An admirable expedient! Is there no danger of its slipping through their hands, or of acquiring a velocity which they cannot check? There is a much better method—*Never set it on the declivity at all!* Plainly. Can these moderate and cautious players be sure that none of those whom they train up in what they term *innocent* pastime, shall ever fall in with others who have less scruple? Have they never heard of a youth who received the rudiments of his gaming education from his circumspect friends, becoming, in consequence of this very acquisition, the companion of vile associates, and the victim of their crimes? Have they never heard of an unhappy fair one, initiated in the mystery of the card-table *under her father's roof*, being hurried away with the maddening fascination till her virtue and her peace were the price of redemption for her forfeited purse?

Such things have been, and such things may again be. The very possibility of their recurrence should inspire every one who values

honor, truth, and purity, with a detestation of the sports which conduct to them, and impel him to lift up his voice and his example against their introduction or use in any shape or any circumstances. The amusement which they can afford will be a miserable compensation for a ruined wife or daughter, son, or brother, or sister. Considering the snares which beset the inexperienced foot, all the vigilance of parents and friends is little enough to keep our youth, the hope of our land, from error and harm.

It is neither right nor kind ; it is wrong, and sinful, and cruel, to fit them for the most profligate company and deeds. Nothing does this more effectually than an acquaintance with games of chance ; for there is no dissipated assemblage to which it is not a recommendation. To have the dearest parts of ourselves in a state of complete readiness for the most alluring temptation to the worst of crimes, is, to say the least of it, notwithstanding every safeguard, a most dangerous qualification. Keep them ignorant of cards and dice, and you erect the strongest human barrier against the seductions of gaming. Teach them the art, and that barrier is thrown down ; thrown down by your own hands ; thrown down to the breaking of your own heart ; and when the destruc-

tion to which you yourself have been accessory overtakes your children, you sit down and vent the bitterness of your soul in unavailing complaint.

The *benefits* of gaming none but a villain or a fool will undertake to display! Its mischiefs are palpable, horrible, endless! Its history is written in tears and blood. Its vouchers are the most fell passions of the human heart, and the most fearful excesses of human depravity. And yet, while facts, which ought to send alarm and abhorrence along every shivering nerve, are repeating their admonitions every hour, parents—parents professing themselves Christians—do, both by example and precept, put their own children directly into the gambler's path! And as if the temptations which assault the age of puberty were too few, too feeble, or too tardy, parents themselves anticipate the work of corruption, antedate the progress of sin, and apply their own ingenuity to help in bringing forward their children to a *forced* maturity of vice. We cannot exempt from this censure any who permit gaming, under whatever form or pretext, in their houses, and who do not discountenance it in their offspring, or others subjected to them, by their severest displeasure. It admits not of dispute, that if the orderly and re-

putable members of society were utterly to discard the game of chance, gambling would soon be destroyed or confined to the spendthrift and the thief. But how can we hope for such a blessed reformation, when, besides notorious gaming houses, many who figure in the higher classes of society play, and play deep, in their own houses. Could these public and private seminaries of all that is base and abominable be exposed at one view to the eye, we will not say of a Christian, but of a political moralist, he would almost despair of our country. The rage for play was lately so great in the city of New York, that public prints ascribed the desertion of the theatre to the multitude of gambling parties! A rare account of the virtue taught and learned at the theatre we must own! We ask a plain question. Had cards and dice not been reputable as an *amusement*, could they ever have become so general as a *vice*? And is it to be wondered at that those places of vile resort, the public gaming houses, should be crowded with our youth? Is it not a perfectly natural consequence of play among heads of families, merely to relieve a tedious hour, that children, apprentices, and servants, should pursue the practice farther, and at last plunder parents and masters, to meet the demands of the card-table

and the billiard room ? The number of those fine young gentlemen who have nothing to do ; heirs of estates, with pockets full of money ; lawyers and merchants' clerks ; idlers, who, by a sad misnomer, are nick-named *students* ; beaux, whose greatest adroitness is shown in keeping out of the hands of the bailiff at the suit of tailors, and shoemakers, and washer-women ; *et id genus omne*, which flock about the gaming houses, is incredible to those who have no opportunities of observing them. But it is not more lamentable than true, that from nine in the morning till eleven at night, and often much later, these nuisances are attended by a succession of youth. Some spend there the chief part of the twenty-four hours, and there are always adepts in iniquity to decoy the inexperienced and uncorrupted. Why is the suppression of these enormities so difficult ? Why are laws so easily, so openly, and so impudently evaded ? One reason is plain—gaming grows less infamous. It grows less infamous because respectable people of both sexes game. The number of gamesters is so great because they are kept in countenance by so many who play only for amusement. Let the experiment be fairly tried. Let the latter give up their *sport*, and we shall soon see multitudes of the former give up their *lust*. The

community would speedily be rid of legions of those fiends who now haunt its retreats, and prey upon its strength. That immovable selfishness; that cold-clouded malignity; that hardened impiety; that fell desperation, ready for fraud, for robbery, for murder, for suicide, which form the character of a finished gamester, impose upon every man a solemn obligation to resist the gaming system in all its parts and progress. Every man, whom the extinction of virtuous feeling has not prepared for adding to the dishonor and the miseries of human life, will perceive the obligation in proportion as he reasons correctly, and applies the discoveries of his understanding to the regulation of his conduct. All our principles on this subject are false, and all our deductions from them impertinent, or it follows, that every one who plays at cards or dice is responsible, to the whole extent of the influence of his example in preserving the knowledge and practice of gaming, for all its tremendous effects on body and soul, on property, character, and happiness—on the best interests of his fellow-creatures here, and on their best hopes for the eternal world.